A MOMENT IN HISTORY:
AN INTERVIEW WITH BILL BEQUETTE
BY PIERRE LAGRANGE

When I started my investigation of the Kenneth Arnold story more than 10 years ago, I found a few mentions of Bill Bequette, the reporter who first interviewed the man whose sighting ushered in the Age of Flying Saucers.

Bequette’s article was published in the paper for which he worked, the Pendleton *East Oregonian* (on June 25, 1947), and in newspapers carrying the Associated Press wire service. I very much wanted to meet him. He was, after all, one important link in a long chain.

Thanks to UFO researcher Greg Long, I located Bequette in the Richland–Pasco–Kennewick area of Washington. I sent him a letter and was pleased to receive a reply from him. I wrote again and asked him many questions. He replied again. Then I told him that I wanted to come to see him in the Pacific Northwest. He warned me that I would be spending my money for little result. I insisted, and I think that my impossible project of reconstructing the events of 1947 amused him. He agreed to see me. We met in July 1988.

Bill Bequette never tried to get any fame from the story he helped launch. I brought with me pictures of the *East Oregonian* building, of Kenneth Arnold and his plane, and of the articles Bequette had written in the *Oregonian*. I also played for him the tape of a June 26, 1947, interview with Arnold over KWRC radio. I had found it only a few weeks earlier.

What follows is taken mostly from our mail correspondence:

**PL:** How did you meet Kenneth Arnold?

**BB:** My first meeting with Kenneth Arnold? June 25, 1947. Both Nolan Skiff and I were in the office, which was small, when Mr. Arnold came in. As I remember, we both talked with him, listened to his story, told him we didn’t have a clue to what he had seen but would send the story to the Associated Press in hopes some editor or newspaper reader might be able to explain the strange objects.

That first meeting probably lasted no more than five minutes. Nolan jotted down a few notes, then wrote a short story which I squeezed into the bottom of page one. Then I punched an even shorter (as I recall) version into the AP wire. We were only minutes from “putting the paper to bed,” so we didn’t have much time to give him.

**PL:** Why did you give the story to the AP?

**BB:** The story was given to the AP as a matter of course. The Associated Press is a cooperative, and a member paper is obligated to offer its local stories. In those days, AP member papers in Oregon were linked to each other and to the AP bureau in Portland by a teletype transmission wire usually referred to as the “C wire.” Member papers “punched” their stories onto the C wire. Other papers were free to use stories from the C wire, and the AP bureau took whatever stories the Portland editors thought had regional or national interest and transmitted them to the AP’s main or trunk wire.

Stories from the C wire sometimes were rewritten for the trunk wires. I punched the original story into the C wire.

**PL:** What happened then?

**BB:** When I returned to the office after lunch, the receptionist’s eyes were as big as saucers—the kind we use under coffee cups. She said newspapers from all around the country and Canada had been calling. They wanted more details on the “flying saucers.” I spent the next two hours with Mr. Arnold in his hotel room. From that interview I wrote a story about 40 column inches long. The story was telephoned to the AP bureau in Portland. Next morning almost every newspaper in the country published the story on page one.

Even after 40 years I feel some embarrassment over the original UFO story. My embarrassment is because I failed to recognize what a big story Mr. Arnold brought into the office that day.

**PL:** Who did coin the phrase “flying saucer”?

**BB:** I don’t remember whether or not Arnold used the words “saucer-shaped craft.” I am inclined to credit his version [that he only spoke of objects moving like a saucer if you skipped it across the water], knowing the tendency of journalists to rephrase. I’m sure I didn’t coin “flying saucers.”

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In the final analysis there is no question that many hundreds, perhaps many thousands, of sightings by competent and credible witnesses are suppressed because of the ridicule, and the failure of our major institutions to address the subject squarely. On top of that, many cases never are carefully and thoroughly investigated. Under these circumstances, we cannot be at all sure about the frequency of real UFO sightings.

Those seeming tidal waves, truth be known, may be more like ripples. But those ripples are portentous.

REFERENCES AND NOTES


Table 5. Sightings During the 1979-1981 Trough

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/3/79</td>
<td>Mindalore, South Africa</td>
<td>Mother and child saw craft on ground, humanoid encounter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/6/79</td>
<td>Westminster, South Carolina</td>
<td>Low-level dome-shaped object illuminated area, up and down motions, light beam.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/4/79</td>
<td>Canoga Park, California</td>
<td>Two beings visible through dome of large glowing disc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/2/80</td>
<td>Pudasjarvi, Finland</td>
<td>Car drove into “fog,” headlights deflected, abduction, physical examination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/7/80</td>
<td>Valdese, North Carolina</td>
<td>Domed disc maneuvered near car, EM effects on radio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/30/80</td>
<td>Victoria, Australia</td>
<td>Top-shaped object with body lights landed, strong physical traces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/27/80</td>
<td>Bentwaters AFB, England</td>
<td>Military police encounter with landed craft, radioactivity and physical traces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/29/80</td>
<td>Huffman, Texas</td>
<td>Spindle-shaped object blocked highway, strong physiological effects, mystery helicopters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/8/81</td>
<td>Trans-en-Provence, France</td>
<td>Disc-shaped object landed, physical trace evidence investigated by official agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/8/81</td>
<td>Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada</td>
<td>Daylight disc photograph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/24/81</td>
<td>Marshall, Texas</td>
<td>Domed disc hovered, beamed light onto truck.</td>
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BEOUETTE—continued from page 15

PL: What’s your feeling about Kenneth Arnold?
BB: Mr. Arnold did not impress me then as a person who “saw things.” And Nolan Skiff also believed Mr. Arnold to be an honest and sincere person who was genuinely puzzled by what he had seen that day. Arnold was most cooperative when I went to his hotel room for a follow-up story. He seemed eager, as I remember, to answer all my questions as fully as possible.

Arnold became the butt of many jokes, some of which were not good-natured, in the ensuing days and weeks. When he came into the office a few weeks after the initial visit, he was carrying an 8mm movie camera with a telescopic lens. His intention, he said, was to get pictures of the next “flying saucers” he saw.

PL: What do you think about the evolution of the UFO debate?
BB: Fifty years after Arnold reported seeing “flying saucers” zipping among the clouds over the Cascade Moun-

tains, and thousands, perhaps millions, of UFO sightings all around the world, I think at least one should have been captured by now. As I told before. Arnold didn’t impress me as one who saw things that weren’t, or who dreamed up strange things so he could get his name in the newspapers. And among the thousands of people who have claimed sightings are some who are not the kind that “see things.” Former President Jimmy Carter, for one.

My skepticism and the disbelief of many others does not mean UFOs do not exist, or that what Kenneth Arnold saw was not real. And there may be substance to the theory, and theories, that some of the UFOs may be ultra-, super-, more-than-top-secret aircraft tested by our government or some other government. Two years ago, I read a book titled Above Top Secret: The Worldwide UFO Cover-Up. Its author is Timothy Good, and the foreword is written by Lord Hill-Norton, the former British Chief of Defense Staff. The title is the thesis, but not in all the nearly 600 pages could I find proof of the charge.

We have a saying that “the proof of the pudding is in the eating.” My Dad would have said, “Show me!”

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