

The World of Flying Saucers
The Maury Island Fragments

The Maury Island Mystery, a complex and eventually tragic affair, occurred near Tacoma, Washington, less than 100 miles from the place where Arnold had sighted the nine disks. In this mystery, too, Palmer was involved. According to their story, two harbor patrolmen named Harold A. Dahl and Fred L. Crisman on June 31 had observed a group of six flying disks that hovered over their boat near Maury Island and jammed their radio when they tried to notify the authorities. One of the disks had seemed to be disabled, had showered down lavalike metallic fragments that damaged the

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boat and killed the dog on board; the disks had then disappeared but the fragments remained as proof of the visit. The men also claimed to have taken some pictures that showed the six objects but were fogged as though by radiation. Back on shore, they had not telephoned the newspapers nor had they notified any government officials. Instead, they had mailed a box of the fragments to Ray Palmer, to prove that they had actually seen an accident to a flying saucer [20].

Crisman was no stranger to *Amazing Stories*. A science-fiction fan, he apparently had accepted the Shaver stories as literal truth. More than a year before the Maury Island episode he had written to Palmer, warning him that the knowledge contained in the Shaver stories was too dangerous to print. Identifying himself as an ex-Air Force pilot who had flown the Hump, Crisman explained that when he was in Burma, he had been exploring a cave when a dero attacked him with a mysterious ray that made a hole the size of a dime in his arm. Palmer had kept up the correspondence [21] and, some months later, received a telephone call from Crisman, then in Texas: for \$250, said Crisman, he would descend into a cave and take some actual pictures of the mysterious underground machines that Shaver had described. The result of this offer is not known, but in July 1947 Palmer received another letter from Crisman; he had witnessed an accident to a flying saucer and was sending a box of the fragments as proof [22].

Palmer considered buying the story for *Fate*, but first he asked Arnold, living close to the scene, to investigate the tale. Arnold agreed. Thus the first man to report flying saucers became also a victim of the first flying-saucer hoax.

With an advance of \$200 for expenses, Arnold flew to Tacoma and into a nightmare of mystery. The two men were elusive, their story full of discrepancies, their manner evasive. Wondering at first whether the affair was a hoax, Arnold finally attributed the strange behavior of the men to their fear of hostile saucers. Alarmed, he called in the help of Army Intelligence. Two officers arrived from Hamilton Air Force Base, California, and made a careful investigation. They found that Dahl and Crisman were not "harbor patrolmen" but salvagers of floating lumber; their boat was scarcely seaworthy and showed no evidence of major repairs; they couldn't

remember what they had done with the pictures they mentioned; and although the saucer accident was supposed to have occurred nearly six weeks earlier, they had never notified the authorities or even mentioned it to a reporter. The only evidence offered for the truth of their tale was the collection of "strange" fragments which were later found to be slag from a local smelter plant. Similar fragments could be found by the ton on Maury Island [20].

The officers concluded that they had wasted their time on a flagrant hoax, but the bewildered Arnold insisted that they take some of the fragments for analysis. Unhappily, on the way back to the base the plane crashed and although two passengers parachuted to safety, both officers were killed. At once fantastic rumors sprang up: that the Tacoma "disks" had been spaceships, and that the beings who operated the craft had been forced to arrange the plane crash so that no one could analyze the fragments of their disabled spaceship. Arnold himself seemed to believe that the crash had resulted from extraplanetary sabotage, but investigation showed a more ordinary cause. A burned exhaust stack had set the left wing afire; the blazing wing had then broken from the fuselage and torn off the plane's tail.

For a time government officials considered placing a charge of fraud against the two men who had started the unhappy chain of events. After further questioning, both had admitted that their "sighting" had been a hoax, planned merely to make their story more salable, but when first Arnold and then Military Intelligence had entered the picture, the hoax had simply gotten out of hand. Since the men obviously had never intended the tragic outcome and were not directly responsible for it, the idea of prosecution was abandoned [1].