

The Battle of Los Angeles - West Coast Air Raid: Unidentified Object

Written by Wendy Connors
Friday, 31 July 2009 03:18 -

Los Angeles, California February 25, 1942

Wendy Connors:

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by the Japanese Imperial Navy on December 7, 1941, America rushed to prepare for war in the Pacific. The West Coast of the United States was considered the most likely area for an invasion from Japan. Consequently, it became imperative to quickly establish an air defense, and provide for procedures the public could use in case of attack from Japan.

These defense procedures included establishing an Air Warden Contingent, as well as employing normal blackout procedures, which were being used in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) at the time.

At approximately 2:25 a.m. on February 25, 1942, the air raid sirens were activated by the military and Los Angeles, California was systematically blacked out. People scrambled from their beds in a panic. Thousands of Air Raid Wardens went to their assigned posts. Something had been spotted in the air approaching the city and the possibility of enemy attack was exceptionally real to a nation now at war.

Not knowing what was approaching the city, the 37th Coast Artillery Brigade began firing their anti-aircraft guns at the target. Firing continued for almost an hour. Later, it was learned that three people had been killed from shell fragments of the anti-aircraft guns and three others died of heart failure due to the ensuing panic. Secondary to the loss of civilian lives was that numerous homes and business had been destroyed. The air raid warning was lifted at 7:21 a.m.

It is a strange fact that the Army Air Corps 4th Interceptor Command's aircraft were warmed up and ready to go throughout the whole ordeal, but orders to action was never received. It appears obvious that the "enemy" over Los Angeles was neither Japanese military aircraft nor U.S. commercial aircraft.

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Thousands of witnesses to the incident had described the enemy aircraft as a large unknown object that had remained motionless over the city during the entire time it was being fired upon. This object(s) then slowly began moving over Santa Monica and Long Beach before disappearing completely from view.

The following morning the Los Angeles Times headline read, "Army Says Alarm Real." Mrs. H.G. Landis was shown looking over a pillow that had been shredded by shrapnel and one resident holding an unexploded 12 lb. Anti-aircraft shell.

The Army, in order to cover itself over the ramifications from the incident, attempted to come up with an explanation to satisfy the press and Congress. On February 26, 1942 General George C. Marshall wrote a secret memorandum to President Franklin D. Roosevelt attempting to explain the Los Angeles incident.

Blaming the Los Angeles Air Raid incident over "war nerves," Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, came under attack from the press. The explanation was too flimsy. The Long Beach Independent wrote, "There is a mysterious reticence about the whole affair and it appears some form of censorship is trying to halt discussion of the matter."

Interesting is the fact that no enemy planes were shot down during the incident and no foreign country admitted to such an attack. General Marshall's letter to President Roosevelt explaining the incident is peppered with such phrases as, "...probably over Los Angeles...may have been involved...if they were... etc.," leads to several possible conclusions. Either the Army was inept as to being able to shoot down an airplane remaining stationary over Los Angeles for over an hour, or the first steps in the long road of government secrecy regarding unidentified flying objects had been taken.

Whichever of the two possible conclusions is the truth, the fact remains that General Marshall was placed in an embarrassing position, and his memorandum to President Roosevelt was almost child-like in its explanation. Not only did General Marshall have the unpleasant duty to notify the President and deal with the realities of civilian casualties, he faced the possibility that reality was transparent; there was more to the incident than common sense and logic could dictate.

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General George C. Marshall would be the first major military leader of the twentieth century to face the unidentified flying object phenomenon, but he would not be the last.