

MAGONIA Supplement

No. 57 5 July 2005



DO UFO FILMS STIMULATE UFO FLAPS?

Martin S. Kottmeyer

IT SEEMS obvious, doesn't it? Surely the answer must be 'Yes.' One's attention is preoccupied by many things over the course of a year and you don't really think that much about UFOs and aliens. Then you hear a film is coming out about aliens. It may be a blockbuster. Maybe it is merely a promisingly good one. Naturally, you are going to think more about aliens. Surely that increases the odds people will think more about UFOs and make them more vulnerable to mistaking any lights in the sky as more mystical and mythical than they really are. If 90% of UFOs are IFOs, something like the media must be causing people to make all these mistakes.

Sceptics have occasionally asserted that this does in fact take place. Famously, a 27 February 1996 NOVA documentary on abductions implied that the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* created a surge of UFO reports in the year following its release. Budd Hopkins charged this was a falsehood and that the number of new sightings decreased. Philip Klass defended NOVA by offering a statistic, "The facts are that in 1978, the Hynek Center for UFO Studies received 1,669 UFO sighting reports, an 85% increase over the number of UFO reports CUFOS received in 1977, the year before the movie was released." (Klass 1996) He cites a 1981 letter to him from Allan Hendry, who was CUFOS's chief investigator at the time.

Later that year, *Newsweek* highlighted this aspect of sceptic rhetoric when the film *Independence Day* was coming out and did a feature essay on the popularity of the paranormal. The author Rick Marin poses the question of whether such films were harmless or pernicious?

Hey, *Independence Day* is just a movie, right? But every time a Hollywood movie or *Communion*-like book penetrates the public consciousness, up goes reports of

alien encounters, sightings and paranormal experiences.

The editors of *Newsweek* pulled out the line, paraphrased it and set it in large type to make sure everybody got at least this concern into readers' brains. As the article also features views of several sceptics like the Amazing Randi, Joe Nickell, and Ray Hyman we can guess the general direction of where this idea comes from. (Marin 1996)

Donald Menzel asserted the 1952 Washington Nationals Flap was an artificial creation nurtured in part by the "well-made thriller *The Day the Earth Stood Still*" since it involved a saucer landing in the middle of Washington, D.C. (Menzel & Boyd 1963)

Elsewhere, a European ufologist blames France's Great Martian Panic of 1954 partly on the release of George Pal's *War of the Worlds* in March 1954. The ads included a disturbing question: Do the flying saucers really exist? He also points to the publication in France between April and May 1954 of two translations: the second book of Donald Keyhoe, the first Adamski/Leslie book, Aimé Michel's *Luers sur les Soucoupes Volantes* in the summer, and Jimmy Guieu's *Les Soucoupes Volantes Viennent d'un autre Monde* (the second edition appeared just in October 1954. (Gonzalez, 2000))

When I did a comprehensive review of theories about what causes UFO flaps a few years ago, (Kottmeyer 1995/6) it occurred to me to pull together some information about the release dates of some major alien invasion films from the 1950s and juxtapose it against a chart of Blue Book UFO report numbers. I looked at 20 films of this genre. They were selected for availability of release date information and my general impression of their relative significance. Bad films like *Robot Monster* and *Plan Nine from Outer*

Space are a hoot, but I doubt anyone would regard them as enhancing the likelihood of more UFO reports. They did not make the cut. Simple visual inspection was enough to raise large doubts in my mind of any causal relationship. The major flaps of 1952 and 1957 had no obvious connection to the release date of any major alien invasion film and it was blatant that certain important films had no effect at all.

Nevertheless, I drew up a chart that compared the number of reports in the month before the release of an alien invasion film with the number in the month following the release. I chose to ignore the number for the actual month of release for one did not always know if the release happened early or late in that month and typically the film was in more theatres the month after release according to my understanding of the distribution process.

Anyone hoping for some simple numerical relationship between films and UFO reports must be largely disappointed. Though *The Thing* brought us the famous admonition to "Watch the Skies," fewer people actually reported seeing anything the following month. Despite *The Blob's* extensive publicity, UFO reports dropped sharply the month after. Curiously, even the presence of a second film being released that month - the creepy and effective *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* - did not enhance UFO reporting. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was one of the scariest alien movies of the decade, but it had no effect in stimulating reports. This is especially curious if one thinks increased fear of aliens might be the salient force in increasing UFO numbers.

The Day the Earth Stood Still had at most a modest effect in the initial month after release - a mere 6 reports more across the whole nation! Yet both buffs and critics are largely in agreement this is the most important saucer film of the

Change between month BEFORE and month OF release

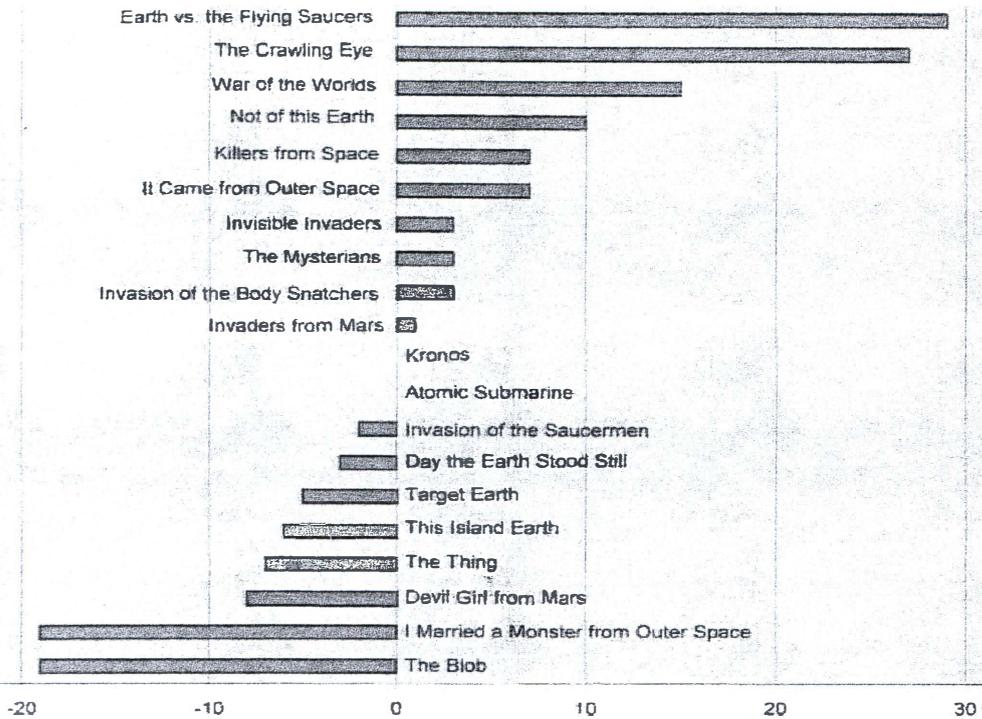


Table 1

Changes in UFO activity between the months Before and After film release date

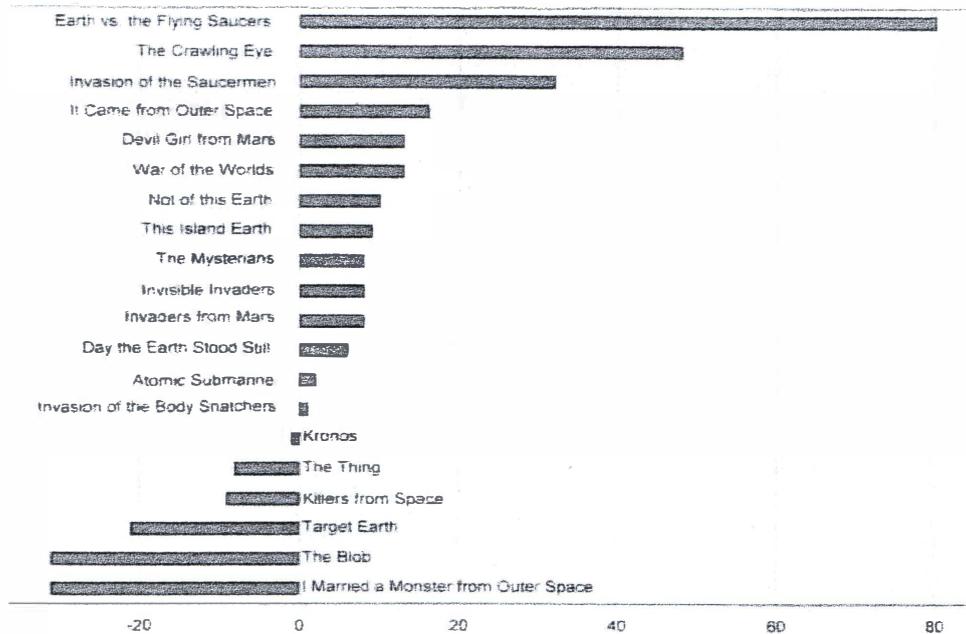
Earth vs. the Flying Saucers	80
The Crawling Eye	48
Invasion of the Saucer men	32
It Came from Outer Space	16
Devil Girl from Mars	13
War of the Worlds	13
Not of this Earth	10
This Island Earth	09
The Mysterians	08
Invaders from Mars	08
Invisible Invaders	08
Day the Earth Stood Still	06
Atomic Submarine	02
Invasion of the Body Snatchers	01
Kronos	-01
The Thing	-08
Killers from Space	-09
Target Earth	-21
The Blob	-31
I Married a Monster from Outer Space	-31

decade. The movie was released in September 1951 and its success kept it playing on movie screens for months. The Washington Nationals Wave, however, only gets rolling in April 1952 and peaks in July, far too long after the release to think that the film was a dominant factor. Menzel's desire to link a major film to a major flap is natural and understandable, but ultimately wrong.

George Pal's *War of the Worlds*, at least here in the United States, is associated with a similarly modest increase in reporting - 13 reports nationwide. Why *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* should be associated with the largest increase in this study is anybody's guess. It is a fine flick, but it is thematically not much different from George Pal's better and more emotionally powerful *War of the Worlds*. Both are basically combat pictures with big ray guns. The modest increase of *War of the Worlds* here naturally calls into question the claim it was responsible in part for France's Great Martian Panic in 1954. (Gonzalez 2000)

This claim was accompanied by assertions of a link to the appearance of 4 important books in France. Among them, we note that Donald Keyhoe's *Flying Saucers from Outer Space* was published in the USA to the most popularity. My copy shows seven printings of the book between October 1953 and January 1954

Do alien invasion films stimulate UFO reports?



so we can safely say there was ample interest and excitement about the book here. Any effect on UFO numbers is not apparent by visible inspection - in fact, if you look really close, one can almost convince oneself any effect was to decrease numbers relative to periods before and after this period of most active dissemination of the book. The Adamski/Leslie book also appears in a period of lacklustre numbers in the USA. Michel's books, though well regarded, did

not generate high interest here. There are no flaps in the years his books appear here and I suspect most American ufologists would be doubtful of an effect if there had been a coincidence. Guieu's book is little known in the States. The Belgian ufologist's argument about the 1954 Wave becomes unconvincing when their effects are tested in the American domain. Why should these media have effects in France, but not in the United States?

It is surely odd that *Invasion of the*

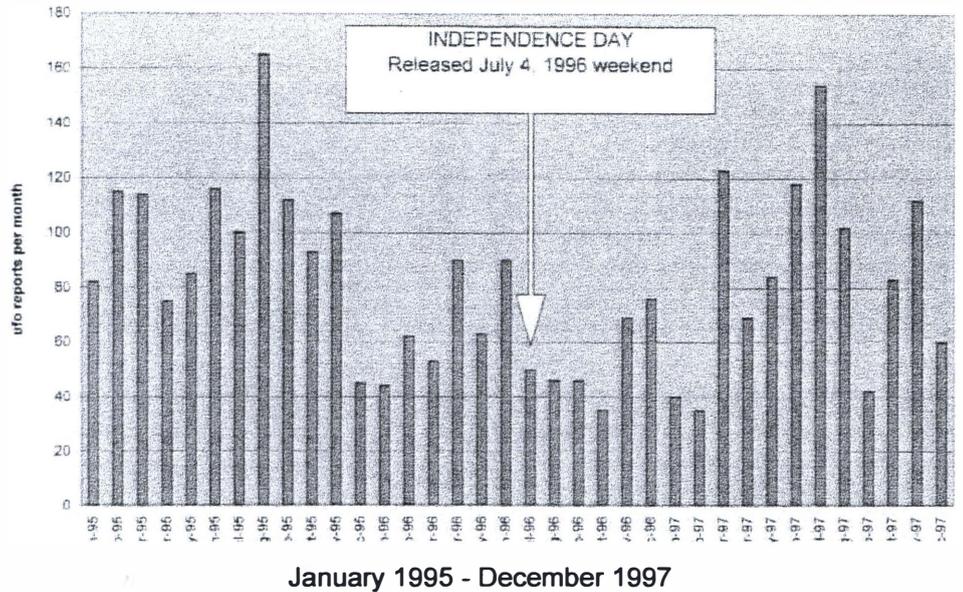
Saucermen, the second largest increase on our list, should have any pronounced reaction because it is a trivial, almost campy, piece of fluff. *The Crawling Eye* does not have saucers or spaceships in it and borders of fluff as well. It has a few good moments, but is mostly a waste of time in the opinion of most film mavens. As a group there seems no ordering principle via importance, level of malevolence, seriousness, emotional power, or popularity. The most hopeful thing one can say is that it is interesting that 14 are associated with increased numbers of reports as against 6 that show decreases. This suggests better than even odds for some sort of effect. Yet it also seems that there must be one or more other factors that swamp or jumble any straightforward causal force.

I should add for the sake of completeness that if you redo the chart using the actual month of release instead of the month after release, the results are worse. Only 10 of the 20 films align with increased UFO numbers with this alternative method. Eight align with decreases. For two, there was no change at all. This encourages a suspicion of sheer randomness and no causal relationship whatsoever.

Rick Marin's expectation that *Independence Day* would lead to a significant increase of alien encounters and UFO sightings did not find proof in the reports collected by NUFORC. The month of July 1996 saw a drop. In June there were 90 reports. In July, there were 50. Embarrassingly, the whole summer it ran saw relatively light levels of UFO report activity when compared to the years before and after.

What, then, of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*? NOVA did say, "In the year following its release, UFO encounter reports surged." Were they lying? As luck would have it, Klass gave me a copy of Hendry's letter without my soliciting it. The chart drawn up by Hendry in the letter immediately throws up an obvious question. The film was released November 16, 1977 in America. Why did the numbers drop in December 1977, the month after the film's release? Worse, the numbers remain depressed throughout the first four months of 1978, the period that the movie was doing record box-office. (*Facts on File - 1978* provides this information most readily) The numbers only go up after the film has left the

What Independence Day flap?



theatres. How could anyone believe there is any effect looking at this chart?

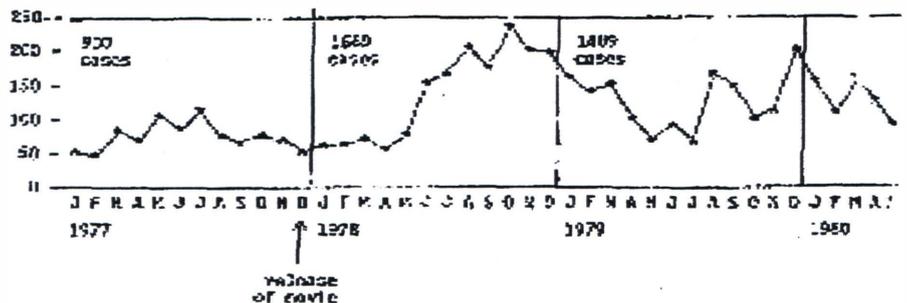
Hendry remarked to Klass, "When CUFOS expected a flap to occur, it was taken for granted that the first months of its release would show the greatest stimulation of reporting activity. Yet that very period proved to be a null in our recorded activity." Klass appended a comment on the copy to me that reads, "People are not inclined to spend much time outside during winter months, gazing at the sky -- especially since the sky is more often overcast than in summer months." Yet look at that chart again and follow the line to December 1978 and December 1979. The numbers are clearly high in December of both of those years, and there is no obvious depression in the winter months generally. Klass's excuse just does not convince. The length of the depression of numbers encourages speculation that any causal effect runs opposite of that predicted. Oh, by the way, by predicted I should add we are not only talking in the sense of logical consequences of a proposition, but in

print in advance of the event Klass had written before the movie:

My own hypothesis is that UFO flaps are psychologically induced by widespread public attention to the subject by news media coverage. On this basis I agree with Dr. Saunders that the next major UFO flap will begin by early 1978, but I predict that the flap will occur throughout the United States, not in the USSR. My prediction is based on the fact that Steven Spielberg, who gave us the movie *Jaws* has produced a new thriller on UFOs that is to be released in the U.S. late this year. If my hypothesis is correct, and if the movie is up to Mr. Spielberg's previous thriller, we can expect numerous reports of persons who claim to have had encounters with strange-looking "extraterrestrial creatures" and UFOs. And when the movie later is shown in Europe and South America, I predict there will be UFO flaps there.

(Klass 1977)

Another sceptic who concurred was Martin Gardner who wondered if events in the movie would be repeated "in the 1978 UFO flap expected as a consequence of the movie". (Gardner 1981) Boyce



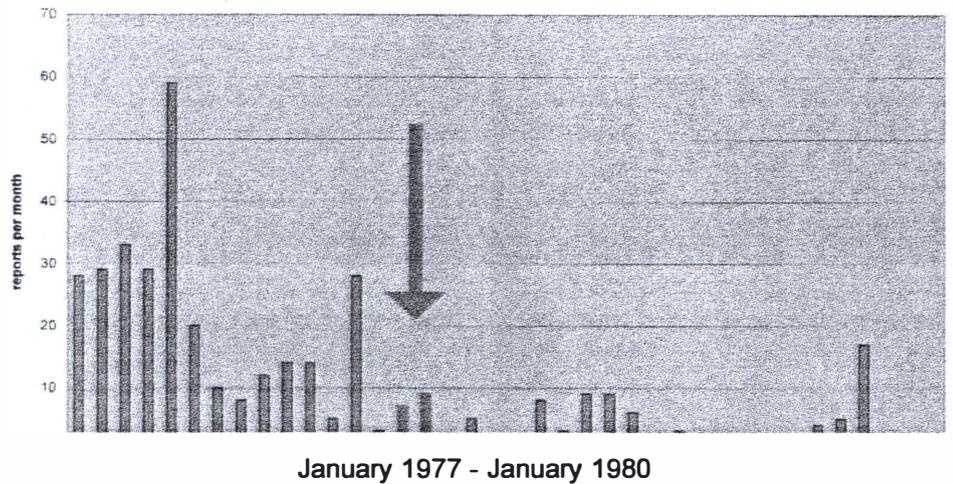
Rensberger of the *New York Times* reported that there was an increase soon after the movie - "Reports of UFO Sightings Appear to Rise With the Curtain" December 10, 1977 - but the article cited no numbers and Jerry Clark declared that he polled some UFO researchers and found things at a very low ebb, with one stating it was "the deadest period in several years." (Clark, May 1978 & MacDougall 1983) Martin Gardner mentioned a great 1978 UFO flap caused by *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in the 23 March 1978 issue of the *New York Review of Books*. He subsequently admitted error explaining he misunderstood a remark by J. Allen Hynek. (Clark, August 1978) But Joe Nickell, like Klass & Gardner a member of the sceptics' group CSICOP, apparently missed the memo. In a June 2000 interview for *SciFi Dimensions* we find him answering a query about whether UFO reports jumped dramatically after Spielberg's film came out, with "I'm sure that they did." A British reporter named Lansdale also stated the film stimulated UFO reports.

The part of Klass's prediction that expected flaps in Europe did not pan out either. Great Britain had its royal premiere of Spielberg's film on 13 March 1978. (Randles & Whetnall 1978) Data from UFOCAT shows there were 7 cases in March and 9 cases in April. These represent increases over February which only had 3 cases, but hardly merit the designation flap, particularly when compared to early 1977, a period that is acknowledged to be a flap, sometimes called the Dyfed or west Wales Flap. (Evans 1988) It is striking how few cases there are in the summer of 1978 and the lull continues through 1979 and 1980. The late 1978 American increase in UFO activity obviously was not echoed in the British population.

Spielberg's film began running in France on 24 February 1978. (Maugé 2004) There were 12 reports in February and 12 reports in March - no change at all. During the 70s, the closest thing to flaps in France occurred in February-March 1974 (46+72) and December 1979 (35). The chart is adapted from a larger one running 1974-1985 and attributed to Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales. (Velasco 1986)

I have no information on when Spielberg's film ran in South America,

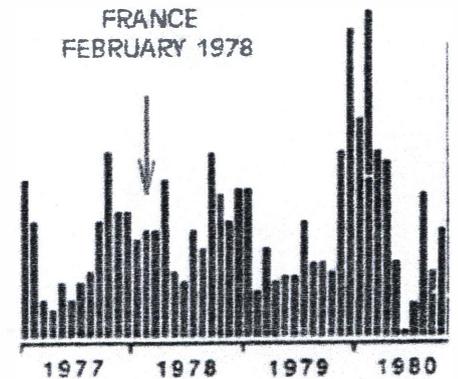
British test of CE3K effect, March and April 1978



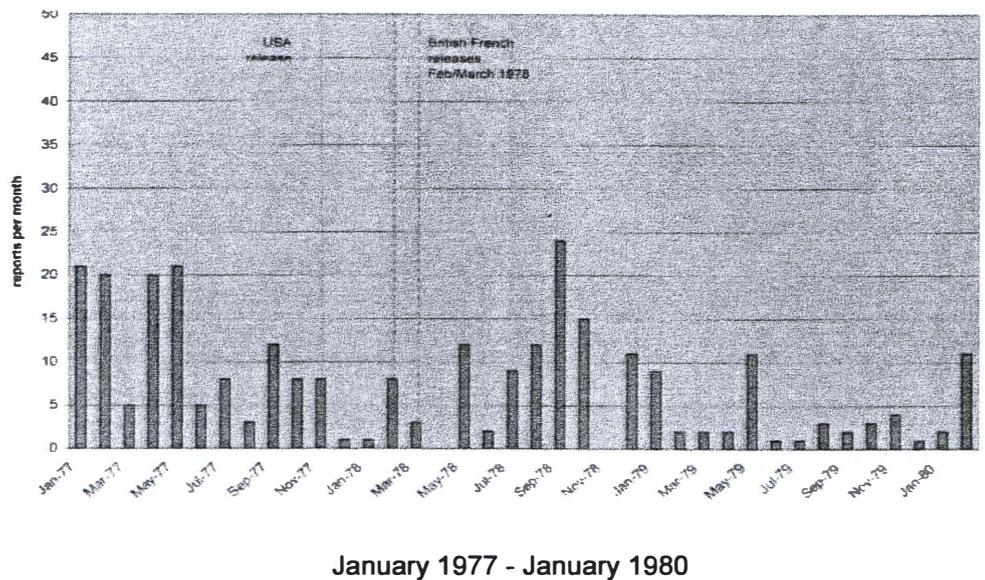
but it hardly matters as UFOCAT proves there were no flaps at any point in the 1977-1980 period. September 1978, the highest peak, had a mere 24 reports. More probably the film was released several months earlier in a period that reports did not even rise above single digits.

The bottom line is that the hypothesis that flaps are created by film media is unconvincing. Any effect does not involve major flaps. Any effect, it has been proven, does not appear consistently enough to base predictions on. Any effect

FRANCE FEBRUARY 1978



South America test



is so counter-intuitively slight you have to wonder if it should be dismissed entirely just to avoid the hazard of losing focus on the main problem - what causes the main flaps? Other failures of media theories discussed in earlier issues can be pointed

to as evidence that the slight results can be rejected as probably illusory products of fluctuations whose nature may result from other variables in the human environment.

Appendix 1



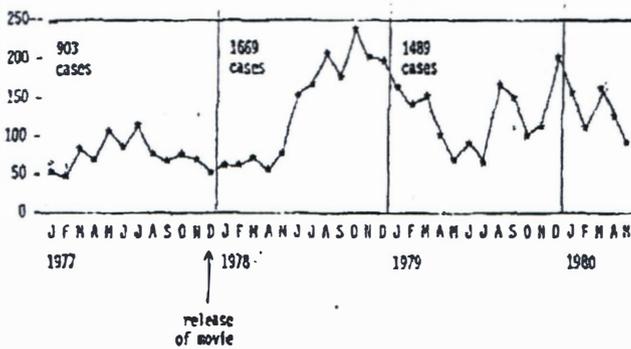
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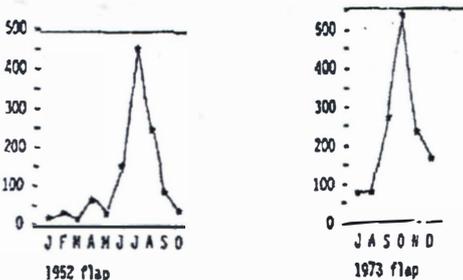
February 11, 1981

Dear Phil:

Enclosed is the information you requested. I assume you are contemplating making 1978 a flap year on the strength of the fall-winter peak as a function of "Close Encounters" influence. I expected to photocopy the original artwork I showed at the Smithsonian, but I can't find it right now. I hope you don't mind the reproduction below:



When CUFOS expected a flap to occur, it was taken for granted that the first months of its release would show the greatest stimulation in reporting activity. Yet that very period proved to be a null in our recorded activity. Informal queries to UFO groups turned up the same result. When I say "flap", by the way, I mean a real flap, such as the following:



(note the compression of scale compared to the graph above)

References

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- Jerome Clark, "UFO Update: More on the Flap that Failed" *UFO Report* 6, No. 2, August 1978, p. 12.
- Hilary Evans, "Dyfed Enigma" in Peter Brookesmith, *The Alien World: Major UFO cases examined and assessed*, Black Cat, 1988, pp. 8-20
- Martin Gardner, *Science: Good, Bad, and Bogus*, Prometheus, 1981, p. 351, reprinting *New York Review of Books* review of 26 January 1987
- Luis Gonzalez, letter, 27 December 2000. Synopsis of thoughts of a Belgian

researcher X. I choose to withhold attribution due to certain ambiguities of the situation. The idea itself, however, had instructive aspects I wanted to bring forward, notably testing stimuli in different populations.

Philip Klass, "The Great UFO Debate" *Current*, October 1977, pp. 18-25 reprinting item in *Christian Science Monitor*, August 24, 1977, pp. 14-16

Philip Klass, "Hopkins Falsely Accuses NOVA Of Falsehood", *Skeptical UFO Newsletter* No. 38, March 1996, p. 1

- There was evidence of public excitement demonstrably keyed to the movie:
- the highest surge of new subscriptions for IUR in its 4-year existence;
- 300-500 letters a day to CUFOS -- asking for free UFO information, or telling us about non-current sightings (some going back years).

Yet these upsurges peaked in January, the month following the mid-December release, and petered out by March, 1978. That indicates that any cause-and-effect relationship that should have been drawn to sighting activity should be limited to the same time period.

As for the increase in the annual total for 1978 (1669) over 1977 (903), one could justifiably call 1979 a "flap" year, too (1489)! The point is, quiescent "non-flap" years fluctuate quite a bit on their own. Air Force totals in non-flap years varied from less than 200 to 600 (a factor of three). The real flap years like 1952 (with 1501 reports) and 1957 (with 1006) are 2-3 times the value of even the more active quiescent years! In short, we still haven't seen a real flap year since 1973.

Yes, I am still the "Chief Investigator" for the Center, although I have to rely on volunteer field investigators much more than I used to when I had an outgoing WATS-line. It's ironic that you should ask that now, though, as I will no longer be affiliated with CUFOS as of the 28th of this month. CUFOS can no longer afford the office rent or its two salaried employees... which I'm afraid includes me. Apart from one more possible publication based on materials with which you are already familiar, I will likely be inactive in UFOlogy as of that date. I hope to devote full time to broader science writing.

Does Aviation Week need an Atlanta-division writer? Editor? Illustrator? Who says UFOlogists are in it for the money?

Sincerely yours,

Allan Hendry
Allan Hendry

⚡ PJX comment: People are not inclined to spend much time outside during winter months, gazing at the sky--especially since the sky is more often overcast than in summer months.

Appendix 2:
Release dates used in tables'
construction. (Warren 1982, 1986)

Earth vs. the Flying Saucers	July 1956
The Crawling Eye	7 July 1958
Invasion of the Saucermen	June 1957
It Came from Outer Space	June 1953
Devil Girl from Mars	27 April 1955
War of the Worlds	October 1953
Not of this Earth	3 March 1957
This Island Earth	June 1955
The Mysterians	May 1959
Invaders from Mars	May 1953
Invisible Invaders	15 May 1958
Day the Earth Stood Still	September 1951
Atomic Submarine	12 February 1960
Invasion of the Body Snatchers	5 February 1956
Kronos	April 1957
The Thing	April 1951
Killers from Space	23 January 1954
Target Earth	7 November 1954
The Blob	12 September 1958
I Married a Monster from Outer Space	29 September 1958

THE NOT SO 'NEW' ALIEN INVADERS

Nigel Watson

- Martin Kottmeyer, "UFO Flaps: An Analysis - The Alexander Imich Award Winning UFO Essay", *The Anomalist No. 3*, (Winter 1995/96) pp. 64-89; reprinted and expanded in Ronald Story, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Extraterrestrial Encounters: A Definitive Illustrated A-Z Guide to All Things Alien*, New American Library, 2001, pp. 646-60
- Curtis D. MacDougall, *Superstition and the Press*, Prometheus, 1983, p. 585
- Rick Marin, "Alien Invasion!" *Newsweek*, 8 July 1996, p. 54
- Claude Maugé, letter, 25 April 2004
- Donald Menzel & Lyle Boyd, *The World of Flying Saucers*, Doubleday, 1963, p. 131
- Joe Nickell, interview, *SciFi Dimensions* June 2000 available on the web at www.scifidimensions.com/Jun00/jnf_ufos.htm
- Jenny Randles & Paul Wetnall, "Entity Encounter at Risley", *Flying Saucer Review*, 24, No. 2, (1978) pp. 16-20
- Bill Warren, *Keep Watching the Skies! American Science Fiction Films of the Fifties, volume 1: 1950-1957*, MacFarland, 1982, Appendix 2, pp. 442-5. *Volume 2: 1958-1962*, MacFarland, 1986, pp. 776-9
- Source: J.J. Velasco, head of GEPAN, "Scientific Approach and First results of Studies into Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena in France", paper presented at AIAA, Los Angeles, 19 April 1986, p. 5

EDITORIAL

UFO sceptics often make the elementary mistake of giving the obvious explanation for a report and later being proved wrong. One of the best-known examples is the Mantell case, where the sceptics confidently said that Mantell had been chasing Venus, only to have the object eventually identified as a balloon.

In this issue, Martin Kottmeyer shows that one of the sceptics' favourite theories to account for UFO flaps - that they are generated by the release of films featuring UFOs and alien invasions - is not supported by the statistics. The obvious explanation is not necessarily the correct one, and there is no reason to suppose that the generation of UFO flaps is a simple process.

In ufology, as in other subjects, correct explanations, where available, are better than plausible but wrong ones.

THEY COME from alien lands in unidentified flying craft that land in the night at remote locations. They come with hostile intentions and infectious diseases. 'They' are usually the aliens of ufological or science fiction literature but in the post-11 September climate 'they' are just as likely to be illegal immigrants or terrorists.

These thoughts are given more weight by the first review of anti-terrorism laws made by Lord Carlile of Berriew, QC, to the Home Secretary. His *Report On The Operation In 2001 Of The Terrorism Act 2000* noted that there are 160 unlicensed airports, mainly used by flying clubs, that have low security and could be exploited by terrorists. Flight crew are also subject to less scrutiny than passengers at most airports, which he regards as a 'crack in national security'. He goes on to say how there could be tighter regulation and security at airports:

'I have been told that the expansion and development of the filing of informative flight plans would improve the situation. I believe that this issue requires attention at Ministerial level on the advice of police, customs, immigration and other officials. It was described to me by a very senior police officer whose views I respect as "the soft underbelly of ports policing". The risk of lethal material entering the UK on a light aircraft landing at a busy general aviation airport or a remote rural airstrip is real.' (page 38. A full copy of this report in pdf format can be obtained from the British Home Office website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/terrorists.htm)

In the April 2000 edition of the finance newsletter *Offshore Alert* it seems that one local airfield has already been exploited by mystery aviators. A local source was quoted:

"At one time, there were a lot of small private planes landing and almost immediately taking off again from the landing strip, but this seems to have stopped recently."

When Matrix Investigations looked at whether aircraft had been visiting the former RAF Binbrook airfield they found several factors that made such activities highly unlikely. In 1995 the control tower was demolished and the runway broken up

into 200 metre long sections. Simon Cross, the author of this report (available as a pdf file at: www.matrix-investigations.net/pdf_versions/sc002.pdf) visited RAF Binbrook with John Ibbotson, a commercial pilot with fifteen years experience who is based at the nearby Humberside airport. After looking at the locality he observed: "Frankly I think you would have to be mad to try and land a plane here." (Photographs by Dan McKenzie taken at RAF Binbrook in the summer of 2001 show the state of the airfield; it doesn't look that bad to me but I'm not a pilot! View the pictures at: www.argweb.f9.co.uk/Binbrook/web/index.htm)

Even if aircraft were able to land at Binbrook, the area is monitored by RAF Waddington on a 24-hour basis, plus RAF Scampton, RAF Hemswell and Humberside International Airport have radar systems in operation. To avoid radar detection any aircraft would have to fly very low (below 400 feet) and it would need to negotiate pylons and masts in the vicinity.

In conclusion, Simon Cross suggests that if anything was seen flying in the area it was probably a model aircraft. The Binbrook Sharks model aircraft club have been flying there on a weekly basis for more than 20 years. Unfortunately, he does not provide any concrete evidence for this, and why would their aircraft after 20 years suddenly become the reason for suspicion in 2000?

What is most important is that no witnesses were named or interviewed to support the contention that aircraft were illegally operating at RAF Binbrook. Only a reference to a shadowy 'local source' was the basis for the story. So why make up such a story? According to Matrix-Investigations' website and in telephone conversation with me (on Thursday 5 December 2002) they represent the PR interests of Imperial Consolidated who had their headquarters at RAF Binbrook.

On their website they note that a *Market Rasen Mail* reporter called Michael Steed is the 'source' who has supplied various rumours about Imperial Consolidated to *Offshore Alert*. They also note that arms dealer Monzer Al Kassar

has been in dispute with Imperial and used *Offshore Alert* in a campaign against them. It also states that rumours of Imperial being linked with Osama bin Laden (in *El Mundo* and *The Independent on Sunday*) might well have caused Credit Suisse First Boston to pull out of a \$750 million deal that would have saved Imperial from closure.

The implication of mystery aircraft at Binbrook was that money laundering, drug dealing or some similarly dubious activity was being carried out at the doorstep of Imperial Consolidated. In this context we can see that these rumours are just a small part in a far bigger and messier tangle of claim and counter-claim.

This part of Lincolnshire, to give Michael Steed some credit, is full of ghost stories and legends. Many focus on the airfields in the region that have a bloody and traumatic connection with World War Two activities. One story concerns a mysterious blue light seen at RAF Kelstern. In WW2 it was a heavy-bomber station but in April 1945 it was abandoned and left to rot.

In *Ghost Stations VI* by Bruce Barrymore Halpenny (Casdec Limited, 1994, pp. 37-41) we are told that a German tourist called Werner Schmidt took a wrong turning and ended up driving towards Binbrook. As he was travelling along in his BMW he saw a hare staring at the night sky. This intrigued him so much that he stopped on what he thought was a lay-by, but in reality this was an old part of RAF Kelstern. He left his car headlights on and he was walking towards the hare when a blue light suddenly appeared in the sky. He said that as it got rapidly bigger and brighter, "I was unable to move. As I held up my hand to shield my eyes from the bright blue light I was being forced down to the ground. I could not move forwards or backwards, only downwards."

After five minutes the light flew away very quickly and at about the same time the hare disappeared. So what was this aerial apparition seen in the September of 1990 by this lone motorist? There are the folklore connotations of the hare being a shape-changing witch, and associations of the area with the ghosts of pilots who died during WW2 (who would certainly want to 'punish' a German motorist in a BMW!). From a ufological viewpoint the hare could be the screen memory of an

alien, plus the driver seemed to experience the Oz Factor and felt a force bearing down on him. Or was this just an illegal aircraft or a misidentified light seen by a tired motorist late at night? Did it have something to do with the activities of Imperial Consolidated?

Simon Cross is correct in stating that any illegal aircraft activity would be reported to the police if detected by nearby radar stations. Just before midnight way back on 1 May 1972 RAF Waddington's radar detected an unidentified light aircraft. It disappeared from the screen a few minutes later and was thought to have landed between Barnoldby-Le-Beck and Laceby, Lincolnshire. The police were informed and within 25 minutes all possible landing strips in the area were visited but nothing was found. The *Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph* (2 May 1972) quoted a police spokesman: "If an aircraft were to land, it would need at least a reasonably flat meadow and landing lights, but so far we have found nothing."

Peter Rogerson in his article 'Interpretation of UFO Type Data In Terms of Contemporary Panics' (*MUF0B*, volume 6, no. 2, August 1973) saw that the RAF and police assumed that illegal immigrants were reasonable for this story. He soon disposes of this idea: 'It is clear that all that was picked up on the radar were some anomalous blips. There was no evidence to suggest that these blips were produced by a light aircraft, and certainly no reason to suppose that they were proof that illegal immigrants were being smuggled into the country.'

More recently the *Financial Times* (10 October 2002) noted that ghost aircraft have been detected in the north-east corner of the North Sea by National Air Traffic Services (NATS). The ghost tracks on their computer screens 'is a known issue with Secondary Surveillance Radar (SSR)' according to a statement on the NATS website www.nats.co.uk/news/news_stories/2002_10_10.html). To take account of this problem NATS controllers increased the separation between aircraft. The Civil Aviation Authority that oversees safety is sure NATS' procedures ensure that these "data jumps and duplicate tracks do not affect the high levels of safety". (See: www.freedomtofly.org.uk/articl/articl78.htm)

This takes us back to Lord Carlile's report and his concern for our airfields. David Stuart in a letter to *The Times* (2 December 2002) thinks we are safe because in his experience as a private pilot our country is adequately covered by civil and military radar that would quickly report any unidentified aircraft to the police or other authorities. Though, as we have seen, it is the interpretation of such data by human beings and the political and social context, that makes them report them as UFOs transporting slaving aliens from outer space or aircraft packed with foreign terrorists and bombs intent on destroying the fabric of our society.

LITERARY CRITICISM

Review by
Martin S. Kottmeyer

Bill Schelly, *Words of Wonder: The Life and Times of Otto Binder*, Hamster Press, 2003

In purchasing this, I was mainly curious to know if it would provide any new information on his flying saucer writings, possibly what he told others about what he felt concerning their significance. There was a possibility the subject might be consigned to a footnote, since I had some awareness he was a prolific writer, arguably a hack who churned out a ton of verbiage over the years, but I got it anyway since I personally respected his book *What We Really Know About Flying Saucers* as better than many on the subject at least when it first appeared. Over time, it has been superseded and essentially forgotten, but even if the biography ignored it that very fact might be of minor interest. When I first got it, I quickly saw that his saucer works were mentioned and there was clear supporting evidence to the view that his involvement was entirely sincere and not just a matter of an ambition of exploiting a new market. I put the book aside, my curiosity satisfied.

More recently, I picked it up again and took to reading it at leisure. It was a fairly adulatory biography and centred mainly on his years as a script-writer for comic books most particularly his massive output as a contributor to the Captain Marvel series, one of the prime

competitors to the Superman franchise and the only imitator worrying enough to get harassed with lawsuits. Binder started first in the science fiction pulps and achieved early respect for his Adam Link stories, an innovative series that took the perspective of life as seen through the eyes of a robot with an emotional side. His move to comics was largely a matter of money; comics paid more and he was young enough to easily adapt to the emerging form. Over the ensuing two decades he cranked out a huge number of stories and achieved respect for doing quality work and surviving where others lured into the field quickly faded. Much of this was done anonymously and at the behest of a publishing industry that sucked in writers to fill as many pages with whatever they could grind out. They raked in the coins of a huge market of young readers.

Binder thrived financially, socially, and emotionally in this period and the idyll of this period is nicely described and detailed. Then in the Sixties, his life fell apart. The comics market shrunk. He hoped to develop his love for the space programme into a science magazine. Potentially, it could have been a lucrative market, so he mortgaged the house. But *Space World* didn't find enough subscribers and he gave it away to Ray Palmer who spent virtually nothing for writers and kept it in a limbo, never really

a success but still existing as the ghost of an ambition. In a financial spiral, Binder came under the thumb of a psychologically abusive comics publisher. His habit for piling on personal insults led to emotional turmoil and Binder's long-standing social alcoholism spiralled out of control. Things gradually improved, but then the rug got pulled up from under him in March 1967 when his angelic daughter was killed by car driven by a mentally-handicapped youth with no licence. You don't need psychic powers to predict how things went after that.

The biographer doesn't connect the dots between Binder's downturn and the emergence of his UFO beliefs. He puts it down to an open mind and the heady UFO frenzy of the Sixties. Yet, there is evidence here that Binder was a sceptic up to 1961 and saucer frenzy was abundant in the Fifties. Science fiction buffs were talking about the subject throughout the earlier decade. *Space World* put him in closer contact with space issues and perhaps one could say that made him more knowledgeable of the puzzle, but NASA folks more generally favoured disbelief. By 1967 *What We Really Know About Flying Saucers* is in print and though it arguably is the most rational saucer book of the mid-Sixties, it isn't difficult to wonder if it isn't really an exercise in mild paranoia. His idea of Project Earth Reconnaissance

metaphorically echoes the eye of his "mysterious masters" of his past - evidently hostile. Phooey on "the brush-off machinations" of the orthodox, i.e. his nasty ex-boss. UFOs exist!

Similarly, it is very tempting to see his later and weirder UFO books, *Flying Saucers Are Watching Us* (1970) and *Mankind - Child of the Stars* (1974), as products of a mind in torment. How much easier to understand it in the prism of a human crushed by the loss of an angelic daughter, coping with an unhinged wife who set fire to their home (January 1969), downsizing into a house in virtual isolation (February 1969), and in the midst of this continuing to pay expensive institutional upkeep on a mongoloid son (since 1955).

This, however, is just a footnote on one facet of a man who otherwise comes across as a very nice, very successful, very moral, hyper-productive creative human. His flaws are pretty minor in the context of his many virtues. Sometimes, adulation can undermine a biography, but the sugar in this one is cut by early struggle, the earning of respect, and a heavy tragedy. In the end, I felt it a very well-rounded story and crammed with a ton of useful information for people interested in learning more about Otto Binder's writing career. Very reader-friendly, I rate it excellent.

Review of Magonia Supplement No. 52

La Nave de los Locos, No. 29, Noviembre de 2004

<http://www.lanavedeloslocos.cl>

El número 52 de Magonia Supplement trae un excelente artículo de Martin Kottmeyer que se centra en la película "The day the Earth stood still" (1951), traducida al castellano como "El día que paralizaron la Tierra". En ese filme un extraterrestre llamado Klaatu llega a nuestro planeta a entregar un mensaje de paz y advertirnos que hay que parar las pruebas nucleares. Para que veamos lo poderosos que son los ET, detiene el funcionamiento de todo en el mundo. Kottmeyer hace parangones entre algunos puntos de la película y distintos casos ufológicos.

La misma edición contiene una traducción del artículo "El desmadre de los ufólogos por perro del Parque Forestal", aparecido en el número anterior de nuestro pasquín. Harney hizo la traducción inspirado en una polémica suscitada el año 2003 en la lista UFO UpDates, donde se analizó el caso de la isla Trinidad y Brad Sparks desautorizó el aporte de Luis Ruiz Noguez por estar escrito en castellano. Pues bien, para que todos sean felices, Harney decidió traducir artículos críticos para que los crédulos no puedan sostener su ignorancia sobre los textos publicados en nuestro idioma. Lea este suplemento de Magonia en <http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk/>. Si quiere recibir una versión en papel, tendrá que hacer méritos.

Number 52 of Magonia Supplement brings an excellent article by Martin Kottmeyer which is devoted to the film "The day the Earth stood still" (1951), which translates into Spanish as "El día que paralizaron la Tierra". In this film an extraterrestrial called Klaatu arrives on our planet to give a peace message and to warn us to stop nuclear testing. To show us how powerful the ETs are, he makes equipment throughout the world cease to function. Kottmeyer draws comparisons between some details of the film and particular UFO cases.

The same issue contains a translation of the article "El desmadre de los ufólogos por perro del Parque Forestal" ["Ufologists go wild about a dog in the Parque Forestal"], which appeared in the previous issue of our rag. Harney made the translation inspired by a controversy aroused in 2003 on the UFO UpDates list, where the Trindade case was analysed and Brad Sparks disapproved of a contribution to this topic by Luis Ruiz Noguez because it was written in Spanish. So, to make everyone happy, Harney decided to translate critical articles so that the credulous would not be able to plead ignorance of texts published in our language. Read this supplement of Magonia on <http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk/>. If you want to receive the paper version, you will have to earn it.

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