

# "UFO Flaps: An Analysis" by Martin Kottmeyer

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**FLAPs** - Periods of time when reports of ufo amass at well above average rates are variously termed 'flaps' or 'waves.' Both terms possess connotative prejudgments. Waves suggest a natural semi-rhythmic phenomenon or the arrival of masses of people, as in the waves of an invasion or waves of immigration. Capt. Edward Ruppelt of Project Blue Book defined flaps as "a condition or situation, or state of being of a group characterized by an advanced degree of confusion that has not yet reached panic proportions" and is thus diagnosing a psychology problem, a crazy time. (Ruppelt, 1956) The presence of two terms to denote these times of accelerated ufo reporting behavior reflect the absence of consensus in ufology's attempts to understand what is behind the simple arithmetical truth that ufo numbers change rather than remain constant over time.

It is not immediately obvious why the UFO phenomenon should not be a more or less constant occurrence over time whether one regards them as real or illusory. If they were alien transports connected with a survey of the planet or a study of mankind, the natural expectation would be that their presence should be methodical and unceasing. If they were accidents of circumstance or cognitive error, one would expect their occurrences to be fairly stable across time in a manner similar to the way traffic accidents remain numerically stable from year to year without showing periods of several-fold increases.

## THE FIRST THEORY

The earliest forms of the Reconnaissance Theory of flying saucers only had to account for the 1947 wave of sightings. Given the extraordinary development of the atomic bomb a couple years earlier, it was somewhat natural to wonder if the equally new phenomenon of flying saucers was somehow connected. The idea was taken seriously in government intelligence circles; at least seriously enough to set up a UFO reporting net in the region of the Eniwetok bomb test. It failed to turn up anything. (Gross, 1986) Donald Keyhoe was a prominent spokesman for this theory and expanded on it with attempts to offer additional evidence in support of it. He observes there had been "a steadily increasing survey after our atomic bomb explosions in New Mexico, Japan, Bikini, and Eniwetok," and a second burst of activity after explosions in Soviet Russia. Attention was focused on the U.S. since it was "the present leader in atomic weapons." (Keyhoe, 1950)

These observations however do not bear scrutiny. The June-July 1947 wave did not coincide with any bomb test. The first Soviet A-bomb was exploded on August 29, 1949 and revealed to the world three weeks later. Yet ufo numbers are seen declining consistently from July to October 1949 and the only thing resembling a surge does not take place until March 1950. The concentration of ufos in the U.S. was true for 1947, but 1954 ufo reports were concentrated in France and still later waves were focused in Spain and Latin America; places that have never been in the forefront of nuclear developments. In February 1951 Keyhoe predicted there would be an upswing in ufo activity in the spring of 1951 due to scheduled atomic bomb tests near Las Vegas, Nevada. Ufo historian Loren Gross has already pointed out the period happened to be the quietest on record. (Gross, 1983) The belief that the first waves of ufos involved the monitoring of atomic bomb developments persists to the present day; as one can see in Raymond Fowler's book The Watchers (1990) But it rests on no reasoned argument and can point to no successes, either in prediction or interpreting any of the waves since 1947.

## THE MARTIAN HYPOTHESIS

Around 1952 a new interpretation of waves arose based on the recognition that waves seemed to peak around the time that Mars came closest to the Earth. Researchers in that era favored Mars as

the likeliest abode of life and it made some sense that travelers might time their arrivals to conserve fuel. Numerous predictions were offered. In January 1952, Lonzo Dove predicted the arrival of a saucer armada on April 15-16 of that year. Dove claimed success with a photograph of a huge circular cloud 30 miles across that he took on April 16<sup>th</sup>. (Dove, 1953) The UFO numbers in the Blue Book files, however, tell a different story. There were only 3 ufo reports for the 15<sup>th</sup>, four for the 16<sup>th</sup>, and six on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Though this is trivially better than the numbers in March, it is pretty small for an armada and not very impressive placed against July's numbers, which ran in the dozens daily. Edgar Jarrold of the Australian Flying Saucer Bureau predicted 1954 and 1956 would be exceptionally heavy and 1953 and 1955 would be fairly light. He called it right for the light periods, but 1954 was exceptionally heavy only in France, and 1956 saw nothing of consequence. (Jarrold, 1953)

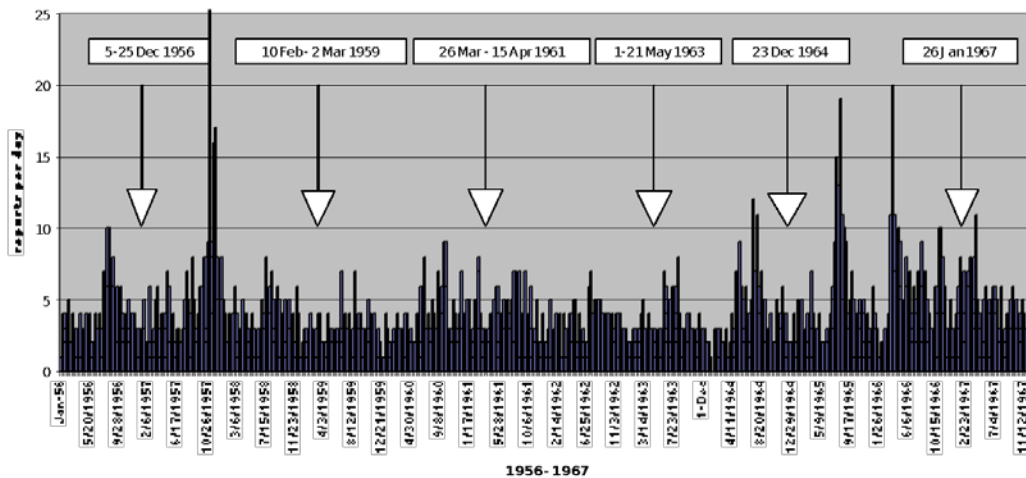
Aimé Michel first thought the Martian Hypothesis was confirmed when a prediction he made for a wave in the late summer of 1954 came true. In his second effort he predicted a wave for eastern Europe or the Middle East in October or November 1956. When this was "double refuted," he endorsed the verdict of the Civilian Saucer Intelligence that the Mars correlation failed. (Michel, 1958) Harry Lord of the Tynesdale UFO Society issued a forecast in 1963 utilizing the Mars theory. He predicted flaps for late '62/early '63 (No), early '65 (No), late '67 (Yes), late '69 (No Way!) and a large peak in late '72 (No). (Lord, 1963).

When the Vallée's looked into the theory in 1962 they would concede, "There is no connection of an obligatory character between the Mars oppositions and the saucer phenomena peaks." They agreed if one works with data limited to the period 1950 to 1956 one can argue a correlation as strong as one in a thousand against chance existed. Data before 1950, notably the 1947 peak, and the data starting with the Sputnik flap of 1957 however fail to show anything one can call a mechanical correlation. (Vallée's 1962) Jacques Vallée would later further discredit the theory by pointing out that pre-1947 waves did not conform to the Mars cycle.

Yet another disproof was offered by Charles H. Smiley, Chairman of the Department of Astronomy at Brown University who computed 14 ideal minimum energy orbits for transportation from Mars to Earth and Venus to Earth between 1956 and 1965 and determined the likely arrival times plus and minus ten days. He then looked at the number of ufo reports to Blue Book for these periods. They were self-evidently insignificant and corresponded to no flaps. (Smiley, 1967) The space probes to Mars pitched additional dirt on the grave when they showed it to be quite lifeless.

Richard Hall offered a variant that proposed that flaps correlated with Venus, but it was DOA. Ivan Troëng, a Swedish researcher, proposed that saucer activity became highly active ten weeks before Venus reached the closest point in its orbit and Earth intersects the tangent from Venus. He predicted Venus would be sending a peak in the last week of May. He announced vindication pointing to cigar-shaped motherships seen all over Argentina on May 27. Oh, hell! (Troeng 1962)

### Smiley's Ideal Mars Orbit Arrivals



### MATHEMATICAL MODELS

A number of attempts to predict ufo waves eschew any theoretical justification and simply base themselves on patterns in the data that suggest cyclicity. Keyhoe tried this in his historic article for *True*. Noting peaks of saucer activity in July 1947 and July 1948, he predicted it would peak again in July 1950. Activity peaked in March that year. (Girard, 1989) Brinsley le Poer Trench (1957) posited the existence of a 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  year cycle and the next peak should be in the "first part of June" of 1957. The peak that year was in November. In December 1971 NICAP reported on the discovery of a five-year cycle and predicted there would be a flap in 1972. That year had 152 reports compared to 137 in 1971 and they proclaimed success in bold headlines proclaiming "1972 Upholds Five-Year UFO Cycle." By November 1973, however, NICAP was reminded what a true flap is all about: "First Flap in Six Years Resurrects UFOs as National Controversy."

Jenny Randles spoke of a 21-month cycle in the Pennine area of Great Britain and confidently predicted May/June 1984 would prove to be rather interesting. By her own later account, 1984 saw only 23 ufo cases and the best clustering happened around April 15 and 25. She found these cases rather interesting, while admitting they may be associated with military exercises. Writing in 1986 she acclaims her prediction came true: "I don't know how." (Randles, 1983, 1986)

The most famous cycle theory was a 61-month pattern offered by David Saunders. He claims it led him to predict in advance a 1972 wave in South Africa. (Saunders, 1976) Allan Hendry characterized the South African reports as a minor flurry and not a wave and also questioned the propriety of using Bloecher's 1947 data in Saunders' since it was a special delimited study. When removed from consideration, the remaining data show the baseline collection of 1947 reports in Blue Book's files had only a small swell of numbers inconsonant with a major flap. (Hendry, 1976) There have been a number of efforts to rehabilitate Saunders' work, but the absence of waves in January 1983 and February 1988 spelled an end to its believability. (Partain, 1985)

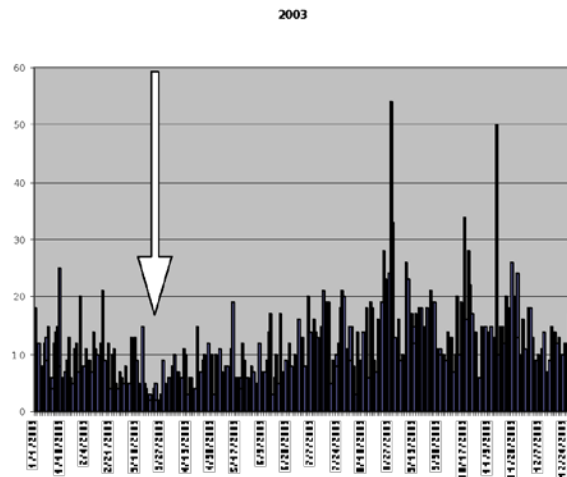
Or at least should have, but Donald Johnson in 1990 suggested that the February 1988 Knowles family CE-2 was "right on target in terms of time and place" and added that two other cases of major importance happened that same night in Australia and Tasmania. He felt this marked the beginning of a major ufo wave, but pointed to no confirming data. Johnson offered a new prediction that a flap would occur in Guam on April 1993 and Vanguard Sciences said they had a fellow in Guam who wondered if any folks would be coming to monitor this flap. (Johnson, 1990)

Undeterred by this seeming failure, on January 8, 2003, he issued a release predicting, "There will be a worldwide UFO wave in the month of March 2003 that will reach its maximum between March 15 and March 25. I am reasonably confident that this wave will involve Northern Europe.

Another likely region is the Pacific Ocean, including Japan and the Hawaiian Islands, and possibly the Alaskan Aleutian Islands. I wanted to go on the record now, a full seven weeks before the anticipated peak in UFO activity, before any upswing in reporting starts. A paper outlining my reasons for this prediction will follow.”(Johnson 2003)

Richard Hall, Wendy Connors, and myself expressed feelings this would almost certainly fail. Perversely, the period happened to have the lowest activity of 2003 and on March 21<sup>st</sup> you get a day with no reports at all - the only day in 2003 where that happened. (Kottmeyer 2003) I have seen no evidence that there was any activity peak specific to Europe. Johnson appears not have presented that paper outlining his reasons for the prediction, but it easy to infer it was a modification of Saunders 61-month cycle theory, adjusted to take account of apparent early arrivals he observed in his 1990 paper. Dick Hall called for Johnson to comment on the apparent disconfirmation of his theory, but there was no reaction published on UFO Updates. (Hall 2003)

Incidentally, the original Saunders theory would have predicted a wave for May 2003, but NUFORC data peaked in September as you can see in this chart. Arrow points to where Johnson predicted a flap should be.



With such failures, hope has faded for a simple mathematical model of mass ufo appearances.

### BEHAVIORIST NOTIONS

Jacques Vallee looked at the pattern of ufo flaps and theorized it was a schedule of reinforcement like that used by behaviorists to instill irreversible behavior. The pattern of periodicity and unpredictability would help us learn new concepts. This control system allegedly also explains the absence of contact and why the phenomenon misleads us. That would preclude genuine learning. (Vallee, 1975)

This theory is amazingly perverse at even the simplest level. Within behaviorist theory, to be reinforcing, a stimulus must be of a positive, rewarding character. (Ruch & Zimbardo. 1971) It must induce pleasure instead of pain. The overwhelming majority of ufo cases involve fear. (Vallee, 1977; Swiatek-Hudej, 1981; Moravec, 1987) Ufo flaps are usually times of anxiety, confusion, and near-hysteria. During the 1973 wave, mothers kept their children from going to school for fear they might be kidnapped. Clearly, learning in any form is unlikely in such an emotional atmosphere.

The suggestion, usually made in passing, that flaps are a way of desensitizing humanity to their presence, of getting us used to them perhaps in preparation for The Landing, at least gets the emotional valences of ufo experiences right. (Hall, 1988) The manner of presentation, however, is wrong. Desensitization is best accomplished by gradual increases in the intensity of the aversive

stimuli. (Skinner, 1974) Appearing in sudden waves and withdrawing for long intervals only favors anxiety and acute fright. (Smelser, 1963).

#### TOURIST THEORY

A more promising line of speculation in the extraterrestrial mode exists in DeLillo and Marx's Tourist Theory of Ufos. They offer as a model the whims of earthly tourism. This year we go Europe; next year the fares to South America look inviting. Maybe a few will brave Africa for a safari in between. Unsystematic but curious gatherings might follow news of Earth-Zoo personnel capturing an unusual specimen of wild humanity. Concerted campaigns by this or that agency competing for business might also yield an occasional bustle of traffic. (Marx & DeLillo, 1979) This is quite ingenious and would seem to be virtually untestable and immune to argument with respect to the numbers. There are, however, broader considerations that work against the theory. The most interesting things in a foreign culture tend to be located in urban settings: their museums, architecture, shops, churches, and shrines. Ufo experiences tend to be in rural settings and the aliens don't debark for tour busses. Souvenir hunting is rarely seen. There's only one or two cases of an alien with a camera.

Gillespie and Prytz (1984) offer a cruder variation in their thoughts about ufo waves. "Flaps stick out like sore thumbs, and can be explained readily by External Intelligence for similar reasons that the Sydney Cricket Ground receives a 'flap' of Sydney-siders on Rugby Grand Final Day - it is a unique place for a certain people at a unique time!" So why were UFOs drawn to Earth and the United States in June/July 1947, July/August 1952, November 1957, August 1965, March/April 1966, and so forth? What made these times uniquely interesting for the aliens? Gillespie and Prytz don't seem ready to say. Instead they complain that those who advocate the idea ufo phenomena are internally-generated haven't explained why these are unique times either "probably because it is in the 'too hard' basket."

Difficulty is not disproof. The necessity of a psychological and sociological approach is mandated by the fact that nine out of ten ufo reports involve misinterpreted stimuli. This percentage does not alter significantly during flaps or periods of calm. (Ballester-Olmos, 1987) Ufos never outnumber IFO reports in any period. Take away all the unsolved cases, and the IFOs still display the large changes present in the total report population. If extraterrestrial craft are causing flaps, you still need an explanation for why one true report spawns nine false ones. Copycat behavior would be the first possibility, yet IFO cases do not generally seem to be in the proximity of unsolved cases during major flaps. This is particularly troubling in the 1965 wave that seemed to lack national coverage of a major case off which a rash of copycats could work.

#### SILLY SEASONS

Sociological explanations of ufo flaps can be divided into two general categories, which for convenience can be termed 'silly season theories' and 'crisis theories.' Silly season theories build on the premise that news media are a sufficient cause of flaps. The spread of news causes the spread of copycat behavior. The example of the Forckenbrock experiment forms the model of these theories. This hoax for a sociology class demonstrated how a false report could generate so much excitement in a locale that it spawned reports in several neighboring communities, including one from a man who said he had seen the ufo for some two weeks and knew it was going to land. (Klass, 1974)

There is no denying this model has application in certain local flaps. The Socorro case of April 24, 1964 spawned misidentifications of things like aircraft, birds, and a fire in a dump in nearby locales. Yet the Socorro case allegedly got national attention. Why didn't it spawn a nationwide wave of reports? Why didn't the Mantell crash spawn a nationwide flap? Why didn't the Val Johnson case or the Snowflake, Arizona (Travis Walton) case spawn nationwide reactions? These questions are relevant since some silly season theorists put great weight on the assumed effects of single cases that get wide coverage. The Air Force cited the Levelland Whatnik as the primary cause of the November 1957 wave. (Strentz, 1982) This is plausible if one regards the slowly elevating numbers of mid and late October as not a true beginning of the flap, but a more or less irrelevant flurry that would have been disregarded if the post-Levelland spike had not appeared.

Herbert Hackett indicates the week of the 1947 flap was "a slow week from an editor's viewpoint" and he felt the newspapers milked the story by continually repeating the Kenneth Arnold

flying saucer story with different experts consulted for their opinions. Hackett (1948) regarded Air Force denials as a paradoxical reinforcement of the concept. He gives a tally of the amount of space given to the story in the Los Angeles times each day, presumably to offer some measure of the amount of reinforcement they gave. It is curious to note that if one juxtaposes Hackett's tally to a tally of ufo report numbers from the Los Angeles area the effect of media is not compelling. One half of the reports occur before the story ever reaches Page One, and by July 10<sup>th</sup> there are no ufos reported, even though it was still on the front page the day before. (Gross, 1976) This finding parallels remarks by John Keel (1969/89) and Richard Hall (1988) that media coverage often seems to lag behind the increase in ufo numbers rather than precede it.

The reason for this can be discovered in Herbert Strentz's analysis of ufo journalism. Strentz posits the creating a flap is a "lowering of barriers" that newsmen set up before they will put a ufo report in their paper. Strentz is not clear what creates that drop in standards. But data in questionnaires he gathered provide a rather clear answer. The major reason given for reporting ufos is an increase in the number of ufo reports! Coverage is obviously going to lag events and not initiate them if this is true. (Strentz, 1982)

The relevance of slow news days to lowering barriers is hard to sustain upon critical reflection. Kenneth Arnold's report of a new craft travelling at 1200 miles per hour was a sensation for its time and would have merited coverage in any period regardless of its doubtful character and lack of corroboration. Flaps have happened in conjunction with major news events like the Sputnik furor in 1957. Philip Klass (1974) has suggested the 1973 wave was, in part, a reaction to a late-summer doldrums following the sordid disclosures of the Watergate affair. The ufo reports were printed to lighten things up for a nation weary of the big news that was dominating the front page. What is troublesome in this characterization of the period is that the 1973 reached its peak simultaneously with the Saturday night Massacre which unleashed a flood of negative sentiment, described by others as a fevered rage that swept the nation. (Lukas, 1976)

Klass devotes a chapter of *Ufos Explained* (1974) to an extended tracing of the effects of media on ufo numbers. His reconstruction is impressive and seductive, but suffers from many difficulties when subjected to close scrutiny. A modest surge of reports in 1950 is tied to the publication of Donald Keyhoe's book *The Flying Saucers Are Real*, but nothing is said of the article in *True* magazine that spawned the book. This was one of the most widely discussed articles of its time. Prominent newsmen like Walter Winchell and Frank Edwards did items on it. The Associated Press carried quotes from it. (Gross, 1983) A look at the daily ufo numbers for late December 1949 and January 1950 are astonishing for their total lack of a reaction. (Kottmeyer, 2004)

Klass observes that ufo reports skyrocketed the same month that *Life* featured a major story titled "Have We Visitors from Outer Space?" More articles in *Look* and *Life* were published in June 1952 and yielded a ten-fold increase for that month. Years earlier, Blue Book investigators looked at the daily tallies, however, and were not convinced there was relationship. A brief increase was noted after the April 4 release of *Life*, but numbers seemed basically the same before as after. (Jacobs, 1975) The tally dropped to zero on the 8<sup>th</sup> and the bulk of the reports pop up two weeks after the article. The June 17, 1952 *Look* article was a debunking piece by Donald Menzel who wrote off the phenomenon as a bunch of mirages. Shouldn't this have decreased numbers? (Kottmeyer, 2003)

Klass skips lightly over the 1957 wave and ignores the July/August 1965 wave entirely because the media did not show much interest in ufos till the swamp gas flap of 1966. This flap is not tackled either, but it set in motion Congressional action and led to six books being published in 1966 and ten books in 1967. "The Invaders" TV series also appears in January 1967. This increased media attention is held to account for a high total of 937 ufo reports in 1967. What is left unsaid is that this represents a decrease from the 1966 total of 1060 reports. Peak media coverage once again lags behind peak ufo numbers.

Hans van Kampen offers a subtle variant of the silly season theory in a 1978 article that relates the story of people seeing a panda that the media said had wandered out of zoo. Unbeknownst to everyone, the panda was found dead just as the story went out. Van Kampen felt this flap of panda sightings indicated that human curiosity and sympathetic sharing of feelings was involved. (van Kampen, 1979) Do such factors underlie ufo flaps?

Curiosity about ufos fortunately has a way of being measured. For a period in 1965 and 1966 there exists a tally of letters to the Pentagon by people making queries about ufos. Often they are

youngsters writing public school essays. (Lear, 1966) Overlap this tally of queries on a chart of ufo numbers and one quickly sees they do not match to a significant degree. Interestingly the queries do peak the same month that *Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report* did stories on the swamp gas debacle, but ufo numbers were already falling. The factor of sympathetic feelings is potentially correct, but not as easy to test or verify. Given the failure of so many seemingly common sense notions about ufos, however, it is perhaps best to suspend judgement about that factor.

Menzel (1963) has suggested the 1952 wave was nurtured in part by the movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still* playing in theatres all spring. He points out that the spaceship in the movie reappeared in many reports during the wave. The movie's initial release actually took place in September 1951. Ufo numbers from August to November run 18-16-24-16, which minimally proves any reaction was neither immediate nor sharply forceful. It is unsurprising in this context that a prediction that Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* would spawn a major flap failed. (Klass, 1977; Hendry, n.d.) A chart of monthly report totals perversely shows a lull throughout the period it was generating major box-office figures. When it leaves the theatres, the numbers start upward in a manner that begs the suggestion the movie somehow suppressed ufo reporting. (Hendry, 1981) It is relevant to add that none of the major ufo flaps coincide with the release of major films of alien invasion genre. This may not forbid the possibility that lesser effects on ufo numbers exist. A look at ufo numbers before and after the release of twenty popular alien invasion films turns up minor increases for fourteen of them. Even if the effect is real, we can still doubt whether this is due to enhanced interest in or attention to aliens, or if the malevolence of movie aliens add a darker tone to the ufo mythos and increases numbers by increasing fear. (Lucaniao, 1988; Kottmeyer, 2005) Paul Meehan has also directed a number of observations critical of Klass's notion that a quantitative relationship exists between saucer films and ufo reporting. (Meehan, 1998)

We can also add that Paul Ferrughelli did a correlation study of Prime-Time Television events and the frequency of ufo reports in a 36-month period from 1987 to 1989 involving 683 sightings reports. The correlation coefficient calculated from the data was +.086, which was effectively indistinguishable from no causal relationship whatsoever. (Ferrughelli, 1991)

There is another problem with silly season theory. J. Allen Hynek raised it in a memoir of the swamp gas debacle. Why was there so much excitement and hysteria over the incredibly trivial Dexter sightings? The media circus makes no sense from the perspective of newsworthiness. Strentz's news judgement barriers had tumbled in a collective mania of the period. They were clamoring for an authoritative statement from the Air Force on what amounted to some faint lights and a glow in a swamp. They posed no danger. There were no aliens seen. It was less dramatic than dozens of cases seen over the years. Why should this be? Hynek had not a clue and pleaded for sociologists to take a crack at the problem. (Hynek, 1976)

It would be exaggeration to regard silly season theories as refuted by all the above considerations. It may be a more detailed study or some novel perspective might yield more convincing results. According to the Condon report, however, there have other attempts to correlate ufo maxima with waves of press publicity without compelling evidence of a real association. It is hard to escape the sense that there is some missing factor or factors.

## REACTIONS TO SCIENCE

The problem that presents itself is figuring out which of the myriad changing aspects of the human environment it is that ufo numbers are responding to. Is it political climates (liberal-conservative, individualism-collectivism, democratic-totalitarian)? Is it war and peace? Is it economic climates? Is it changing styles in the exercise of power? Is it changes in collective perceptions of powerlessness? Is it a response to fluctuating religious-secularist fashions of living? Is it a response to different educational fashions? Are there changes in skepticism and gullibility, cynicism and trust? Are people more sky-oriented and filled with wanderlust in some times more than others?

One interesting stab in the dark was John A Rimmer's guess that for every scientific advance is an equal and opposite mystical reaction. The ghost rockets of 1946 and the saucers of 1947 would thus be a reaction to the introduction of nuclear weapons in 1945. The 1957 Levelland wave would be the obvious reaction of the introduction of space travel represented by the Sputniks the

same month. Did the other flaps follow major scientific advances? Was there a reaction associated with the Moonlanding? (Rimmer, 1969) The depressing answers are no and no, despite the poetry of the idea.

### CRISIS THEORIES

One of the venerable mainstays of sociological thought is the concept of crisis as an agent of social change. There is a sizeable literature devoted to crisis cults and how stressful events prompt new interpretations of religious doctrines, visions, and myths. (LaBarre, 1972) Among the axioms of crisis theory is the proposition that crises create the wishes for supernatural solutions? (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987) Ufos can be regarded as supernatural in the official sense that they are forces outside of nature that suspend, alter, and ignore physical forces. Are Ufos a magical reaction to crises? Otto Billig has offered the most extended argument that they are. His application of crisis theory to the data of the ufo phenomenon is probably as close to textbook as can be expected and it cannot be denied that there are facets to his thesis which work. In the specific realm of ufo flaps, however, difficulties are clearly evident. In his usage, the concept of crisis embodies such a wide range of events one is left wondering why we do not see a steady stream of reports instead of the widely separated peaks of activity that are actually present. This is vividly exemplified by Billig's annotations on a chart of Air Force compiled monthly ufo tallies. Periods of crisis cover roughly 67% of the time interval from 1947 and 1969 by his own illustration. Yet only eight percent of this interval shows numbers that could be reasonably termed flaps. (Billig, 1982) Even if we regard crisis not as a primary causal agent, but as a necessary catalytic factor, there is no way to discount the plausibility that these flaps overlap the 67% regions of crisis simply by chance.

Lloyd de Mause's psychohistorical investigations of the fantasy-life of American politics provide a more useful definition of crisis. Utilizing a protocol called fantasy analysis on a mass of historical documents and news stories, de Mause charted a regular sequential change of the perception of the strength and impotence of American leadership. For our purposes we will only look at one of the recurring stages that is specifically perceived as a phase of crisis and collapse. It is identified by a proliferation of emotional metaphors involving fantasies of death and dying. Unnamed poisonous enemies multiply as the group displaces rage outwards. Apocalyptic and millennial overtones are generally present. De Mause's group fantasy definition allows a restriction and demarcation between crises that are merely annoyances and crises that are felt with intense emotion. It has the added virtue of having been constructed independent of any interest in ufos. There would be no question of crises being selected in a manner to skew acceptance of the crisis theory. (De Mause, 1982)

Six group fantasy crises occurred between 1952 and 1977, the period that de Mause limited himself to. They comprise only 18% of this 25-year interval. If all five major national flaps fell into these well-defined bands of crisis, we would have impressive statistical proof of a true relationship. Regrettably, only one wave - 1957 - occurs during these crises and this is no better than chance.

It might be that political crisis is the wrong form of crisis to be looking at. Charles Fair offers a variant restriction of crisis theory that suggests ufo graphs are gauges of collective anxiety corresponding to alignments of power during the Cold War. Thus flaps happen at the times of Dulles' "brinkmanship," the opening phases of the space race, and the entanglement in Vietnam. (Fair, 1974)

There is one killer problem that stares any potential convert of such crisis theories in the face. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 was the single most terrifying event in the twentieth century. Fear of nuclear annihilation was palpable and imminent. If ever an impetus for salvationist fantasy and magical escape existed, it had to be then. We should have seen the biggest ufo flap imaginable. This not only failed to happen, but ufo numbers actually dropped during the crisis.

Billig tries to excuse this incongruity in his application by trying to draw a distinction between crises that focus on specific situations and those that pose a vague threat, which leaves the individual without adequate defenses. The distinction sounds phony since every individual without a fallout shelter had no defense against a nuclear exchange. The wish for aliens to come down and rescue us naturally seems a logical supernatural solution obliged by the axioms of crisis theory. Peter Rogerson (1981) alternately proposed the crisis was over so fast that there was not enough time for a salvationist fantasy to develop. The 1957 wave, however, showed a ten-fold

increase in the matter of three days. And, to repeat, the numbers actually went down during the crisis. Surely some kind of increase should have been registered. Such excuses just don't wash to anyone who lived through this collective staredown with death.

Crisis theory probably does not work here because the salvationist impulse does not form the core of the dominant rumor complex about ufos. While the impulse is certainly present in the contactee complex of people like George Adamski and George Hunt Williamson, this is distinct from the beliefs of people like Donald Keyhoe and Coral Lorenzen who saw ufos as spycraft and potential invaders. (Rogerson, 1978/79) It is also distinct from those who felt saucers were secret weapons: the true dominant belief of the Fifties and Sixties in the general public. Most cases speak not of escaping earth and all its sorrows (the John Lennon ufo is a well-known but nearly unique exception to the rule), but express fears of many varieties from being spied upon, being captured, being chased, being contaminated, and being run into.

#### MASS HYSTERIA

The suggestion that flaps are a form of collective hysteria seems initially more promising as a way to account for the fears seen in ufo experiences. Mark Rhine in the Condon report and Robert Hall point to certain episodes of mass hysteria or hysterical contagion like the June bug epidemic, the Seattle windshield pitting epidemic, and the Mad Gasser of Mattoon, wondering if they may serve as explanatory models for what is going on with the ufo phenomenon. Neither takes the idea very far and Hall pointed out several difficulties in comparing these phenomena, probably the most notable being the fleeting character of these model epidemics. (Sagan & Taves, 1974) Michael Swords suggests these models are more properly labeled as anxiety attacks and adds the point that the people involved do not display psychotic symptoms - "they do not add unreal experiences to their beliefs." He firmly denies hysteria or mass psychogenic illness makes any contribution to the great mass of ufo reports and his detailed argument is strongly recommended as a thorough demolition of this line of inquiry. It further warns us that the etiology of flaps will not be analogous to neuroses, but psychoses. (Swords, 1984)

Allan Hendry's study of 1158 IFO reports demonstrates conclusively there are important emotional forces connected to the ufo mythos that compromise the objectivity of percipients of ufos. Commonplace stimuli like stars, balloons, and the like are imaginatively reconstructed with unreal traits like domes and the saucer shape. Witnesses are totally sincere and most are eminently articulate even when offering greatly distorted observations. IFO witnesses are found in skilled trade jobs and with both general and specialized education. Competency and the ability to reason critically are not the issues. Emotions and expectations are subverting the perception process. (Hendry, 1979).

#### PARANOIA THEORY

Many facets of the ufo mythos are identifiably forms of paranoid ideation. The core belief that aliens are making a reconnaissance of our planet, that, to borrow a title from the Sixties, *Flying Saucers are Watching Us*, is a collective variant on the common paranoid delusion of observation, the erroneous impression that one is being watched by persecuting others. Allied to this is a large complex of suspicions.

The government knows more than it is telling. It is purposefully misleading the public. It secretly gathers up all important evidence like photos and crashed saucers. The saucers may be secret weapons of America, Russia, and even Nazi scientists. Concerns about invasion, poisoning, irradiation, mind-tampering, doppelgangers, night-doctors, and sexnappings are seen. Myriad fantasies of world destruction have been ubiquitous among both ufologists and experiencers.

Norman Cameron guesses the incidence of paranoid reactions in the general population to be quite high. Transient paranoid misinterpretations may happen to virtually anyone in the right set of circumstances. (Cameron, 1959) In certain individuals paranoid ideation becomes fixed and chronic. Even in these instances, there is no loss of mental competency in most other aspects of their lives. Indeed they may often perform at superior levels. (Rosen & Fox & Gregory, 1972) Paranoia is essentially an intellectual disorder which is strikingly, meticulously logical after the basic emotional axioms are laid in. (Fried & Agassi, 1976) The point is that Hendry's facts about IFO reports are consistent with either transient or chronic paranoia. This allows one to speculate on

the origins of the waves of misinterpretation generated by the ufo mythos, for there is no mystery about the origins of paranoiac reactions.

Kenneth Mark Colby has critically reviewed the formulations offered by several researchers for the origin of paranoia and convincingly concluded that only shame and humiliation adequately explained the range of known precipitants of paranoia. Injuries to the ego in such forms as personal slights, job failures, false arrests, accidents, deformities, and sexual defeat exemplify the varied events seen at the beginning of paranoid psychoses. (Colby, n.d.) Underscoring the primacy of personal pride over personal danger is fact that paranoia is more often associated with people experiencing thwarted ambitions than with people holding few expectations in a hazardous environment. (Meissner, 1978) If flaps are being governed by the dynamics of paranoia, we should be asking if they are being generated by episodes of collective shame.

#### APPLICATION

In the case of the major ufo flaps in America, such a question yields good answers. The 1947 wave was obviously triggered by the phrase flying saucer entering the language and the presumption that they represented a superweapon closely analogous to the atomic bomb developed in supersecrecy by the Manhattan Project a couple years earlier. This fed into a hysterical anti-communism that was spawned earlier in 1947, specifically March 12<sup>th</sup>. On that date Truman addressed a joint session of Congress and spoke in sweeping, apocalyptic terms of communism as an insidious world menace. Those who loved freedom would have to struggle with it at all times and all fronts. Truman quickly set up a federal loyalty review program. One aim of this speech was to garner military aid to support a Greek regime in the throes of a civil war by scaring the hell out of the American people. The aid was granted, but it succeeded too well in scaring people. Norman Thomas was making a trip through California that spring and was amazed at how quickly "hysterical anti-communism swept the state." Historians David Cauter and Athan Theoharis confirm this pervasive fear of communism quickly gripped the nation. A poll in 1947 showed 66% of Americans believed the Soviet Union was "aggressive" compared to 38% in 1945. (Boyer, 1994) One of the earliest moves by the government in investigating the flying saucer problem included background checks of those who claimed to have seen saucers to determine if they had communist ties. They didn't. The erosion of basic trust by loyalty tests of Americans could be a key factor in the escalation of paranoia in this period.

The 1952 wave begins with the rising furor of an upcoming steel strike planned by laborers in the steel industry. In that era, steel was a major force in the American economy and an integral part of American national identity. The strike deeply divided the nation because the nation was then fighting a war in Korea and such an action was perceived as a traitorous threat to the strength of the nation. President Truman seized the steel industry to keep the mills running. In due course, however, the courts declared the seizure unconstitutional and the strike began in earnest.

Ufo numbers respond to developments in the steel strike in a convincing manner. Numbers grew up to the time of the seizure and then fell for a time. After the courts ruled and the strike proceeded, UFO numbers began upwards and skyrocket to record proportions, culminating in the frenzy of the Washington National sightings. Three days after the first Washington National sighting the strike was settled. Within a week, the numbers begin to collapse, assisted by an announcement that the D.C. cases were caused by a temperature inversion.

#### SPUTNIK

Sputnik was indisputably the central trauma of the Fifties generation and a profound blow to American self-esteem. The U.S. prided itself on being the most technologically advanced nation on Earth. Yankee ingenuity was a term of self-endearment. Sputnik called all this into question. The Russians were the first to orbit a satellite around the Earth and we were not. This event gnawed away at the American psyche such that millions were funneled into the space program over the following decade in a race to put a man on the moon before the Russians and restore self-confidence in our superiority.

A look at the ufo numbers are puzzling at first glance because the peak happens after the launch of Sputnik II, a month after Sputnik I. Shouldn't the Levelland flap follow the initial Sputnik more closely? A memoir of the period by NASA clarifies the paradox. The alarm did not materialize immediately. Planetariums and ham radio operators became more active after the first

announcement, but Newsweek correspondents first found "massive indifference" and a vague feeling we had entered a new era. After a week, this bewilderment melted away before a mounting and almost universal furore. Between October 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> a lot of blaming was going on in Washington D.C. and calls went up for improving education. Successful rocket tests between October 17<sup>th</sup> and October 23<sup>rd</sup> offered hope we were catching up, but then on November 3<sup>rd</sup> Russia announced the launch of a second even more spectacular sputnik with a dog on board named Laika. (Green & Lomask, 1970) Add into this emotional brew news of an ufo incident in which an ufo caused automobiles to fail and the numbers exploded ten-fold.

Numbers dropped off from the 6<sup>th</sup> onwards probably because of the whimsical Trasco case, wherein aliens tried to kidnap a guy's dog, an obvious spin on Laika. The Schmidt contact may also have been a factor for authorities quickly proclaimed the man an ex-con. Numbers remain elevated in the ensuing weeks. There is a temporary sharp decline accompanying the explosion of a Vanguard rocket on December 6<sup>th</sup> and some see that as point against paranoia theory. Yet while this was clearly a humiliation for workers on the Vanguard project and they were treated like they had committed treason, people in general seemed disappointed and depressed. Paranoia is in part a defense against depression and does not manifest itself in the depths of mourning. (Meissner, 1978) It is more usually associated with frenzy and manic thought. The flap resumed briefly in the days that followed, but by late December it was essentially over. The launch of Explorer I on January 31, 1958 was a relief, but ufo numbers were already so low by that date that no further decline was immediately apparent since there were only one to three reports per day. Even so, the total for February was 41, down from January's 61, and potentially indicative of restored pride.

## SIXTIES

The UFO wave of July-August 1965 coincides with two major events that introduced the nation to two extended nightmares: the Vietnam debacle and the race riots. The first U.S. ground combat operation began on June 28, 1965. While the U.S. had been involved in Vietnam with aerial bombing before this date, the ground combat denoted a new level of development. Unfortunately it quickly turned out that the troops were engaged in a "futile assault." On July 4<sup>th</sup>, Hanoi repulsed overtures for peace. On July 20<sup>th</sup> U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Mc Namara reported the situation in Vietnam was deteriorating. On July 28<sup>th</sup> a troop build-up was announced and draft calls issued. Ufo numbers were virtually flat from January to June, but with July gradual, but erratic increases are unmistakable. A small two-day decline around July 15<sup>th</sup> coincides with news of Mariner 4 reaching Mars - a brief moment of technological triumph.

The flap reaches a peak on August 4<sup>th</sup> as the reality of the Draft sinks in, then drops down quickly for a week when the second blow hits. On August 11: the Watts riot. From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> the Watts suburbs go up in flames when racial tensions erupted. Ufo numbers seem to go up in response for a secondary peak on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of August. Beginning on August 18-19 and in mid-September successful Vietnam operations at Chulai, Da Nang, and An Khê are accompanied by declines of ufo numbers and the flap gradually fizzled out.

The swamp gas flap is significantly smaller than the other flaps we are considering here, but we can answer Hynek's question posed earlier. Five days before the Dexter-Hillsdale, on March 15, 1966, a new Watts riot came into the headlines. Ufo numbers that had running flat for weeks amid stories of truces, peace bids, and talk of the Great society, began to surge in response. Then on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, two days before Hynek's press conference, came the first anti-American demonstrations in Hue and Da Nang. The flap peaked on March 30<sup>th</sup> and presumably declined for lack of further race riots or anti-American demonstrations. News of Saigon riots and further anti-U.S. outbursts on April 4<sup>th</sup> was followed the next day by a secondary peak. An anti-U.S. riot in Hue on May 26<sup>th</sup> and the flaming suicide of a religious figure on May 29<sup>th</sup> were also accompanied by brief, lesser increases.

Over the months that followed, ufo numbers tended to remain at elevated levels, but visibly fluctuated in response to developments in Vietnam. During a period of record casualties in March 1967, ufos were clearly swarming about. During the Christmas truce and peace proposals of late December 1966, the ufos vanished. A curious proof of the importance of Vietnam War news in modulating ufo numbers came in June 1967. Between June 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, Vietnam was completely knocked off the front page by an Arab-Israeli war. For four days straight Blue Book did not receive a single report! This interesting fact, we can add, calls into question Thomas Bearden's linking the 1973 flap with mid-East War tensions. (Bearden, 1980)

## OTHER RESOLUTIONS

Blue Book went out of business at the end of the 1960s and with it ended any conveniently accessible daily tally of ufo numbers. This makes detailed comparison of the 1973 wave with the events of the Watergate crisis. But we can point out that David Jacobs called mid-October the peak period of the flap and this roughly corresponds with Vice President Agnew's resignation on October 10<sup>th</sup> followed ten days later by the Saturday Night Massacre. (Jacobs, 1975) It unleashed a flood of negative public sentiment and calls for impeachment. This was against a leader who less than a year before had been reelected in a landslide of popular support. (Lukas, 1976)

The ups and downs of national pride also seem to correlate with lesser swings of ufo numbers. News of poverty in Appalachia, charges that Reds had infiltrated the State Department, and some of the desegregation conflicts seem to relate to increases in ufo activity. Conversely when we landed on the moon, when the Reds were retreating during the Korean war, and when Ike went on his "Peace Tour" ufo reports vanished.

The drop of ufos during the Cuban missile crisis, so troubling to crisis theory, is readily understood when one recommends the salient issue is not fear and anxiety, but pride. It was the Soviets who backed down from that face-off, not America. A drop-off in ufo numbers following the Kennedy assassination, another if lesser conundrum to crisis theory, is fully explicable with the observation on how mourning and melancholy decreases paranoid ideation. (Meissner, 1978).

## PROBLEMS AND CONFUSIONS

It must be said that efforts to extend the theory forward to events after 1973 have been disappointingly ambiguous. National pride was clearly present with such events as November 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, the successful 1989 invasion of Panama, and the victorious Persian Gulf War of February 1992. Each of these events can be linked to periods of zero activity in data collected by the National Sighting Research Center. Stretches of zero activity, however, are so common in this data set that one could fairly dismiss the correlation as due to chance.

The television sex scandals of the 1980s seemed a rather blatant episode of collective shame and should have prompted paranoiac reactions among the faithful. In fact, there is unequivocal evidence that they did in the form of satanic rumor panics. One swept North and South Carolina on March 14, 1987, five days before Jimmy Baker finally resigned, and another swept the region of the Alexandria and Baton Rouge ministries of Jimmy Swaggert on April 1, 1988, the week before he was defrocked for sins he confessed to the prior February. (Victor, 1990) Inspection of daily ufo tallies does not show a parallel increase of ufo activity either nationally or in the region of the ministries. One might be tempted to shrug this off by saying ufos would be too secular a way to express paranoia in a religious population, but it gets worse.

The Watts riots of the 1960s seem clearly linked to a spike in ufo activity, but when riots struck Miami in mid-January 1989 and in Los Angeles after the Rodney King verdict near the end of April 1992, no spike in ufo activity was visible. Post hoc, one can say that only riots in Watts seem linked to ufo spikes and that other race riots in the Sixties generated no response. Perhaps it was special in some way, but why that should be is not immediately apparent.

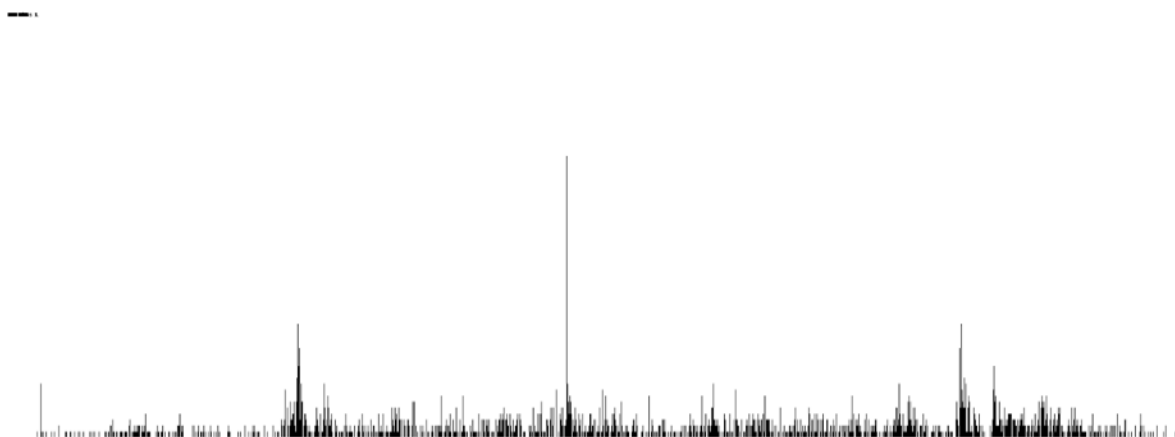
The most puzzling development occurred during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. The emotional highpoint seemed to occur in the wake of the confession of wrongdoing by the President in the summer of 1998. Angry discussions of the shame it had brought to the country prompted me to check the National UFO Reporting Center's database for activity. The site's home page remarked "September has been an incredibly active month for ufo reports, including mass sightings of blue-green fireballs across the United States." The next month a message was posted reading, "A UFO wave sweeping the country characterized by mass sightings of spheres and fireballs continued throughout October." In November, the description is upgraded even further: "Our [report database](#) (updated Nov 21) continues to document an incredible UFO wave sweeping the country." This description was retained through January 1999. Seemingly this was proof positive of the paranoia theory, but then the number of reports continued increasing well after tempers calmed down. Numbers slowly mount to a peak in the fall of 1999 and then fall from December through the start of the new Millennium. (NUFORC, August 2000) Critics wonder if this was 'really' a flap or if there it was some form of collection artifact of Internet growth - a new link from a popular site bringing in more people or some such development - that just coincidentally started in at the time of the scandal. The situation is thoroughly confusing.

Another issue that draws comment is the absence of Blue Book era sized flaps since 1973. Was there some factor that suppressed the creation of flaps other than pride? This seems plausible in terms of changing perceptions about the nature of the saucer menace. Where the Fifties was dominated by concerns saucers were secret weapons and the Sixties by fears of invasion, the Seventies ushered an era of speculations that ufos were a charade and perhaps harmless. The movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in particular advanced a vision of aliens as children of light and awe which was a polar opposite to the paranoid fantasies that dominated the prior decades. Such changes would act to reduce fears about what unexplained lights portend and subvert the superego - think parental oversight - aspects of earlier ufology. Obsessions with Roswell and abduction in later years decreased interest in interpreting aerial puzzles in favor of talk about conspiracies and dream interpretation.

While this might seem to render the theory immune to further test until such time as we see a return to enthusiastic belief in reconnaissance and invasion, further work can yet be done in the area of foreign flaps. Was France's Great Martian Panic of 1954 connected to the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the pullout of troops from the IndoChina war? What caused the Latin American Wave of 1965? What of the British Scareships of 1912-13?

Criticisms of paranoia theory have been few and generally obtuse. It has been called unfalsifiable, but a pattern of high ufo activity congruent with events of pride such the Persian Gulf War, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, the Moonlanding, the Red retreat of the Korean War, etc. would quickly sink the theory in the eyes of any theorist. A pair of people wondered about the absence of Bullard's 1988 paper on flaps in the discussion. Simply, Bullard did not advance any theory. His paper boils down to the proposition, 'Silly season theory is wrong, ergo ufos are real.' But IFOs are real, too, and he offers no explanation why either changed in frequency when they did. Jerome Clark singles out the explanation of the 1952 wave as "incredible," using the phrase "a hysterical reaction to a steel strike" to describe his understanding of the theory. In fact, mass hysteria was rejected as an explanation of flaps generally in the first presentation of the theory. There are no details on why he feels it doesn't bear consideration. Philip Klass has termed the theory "simplistic" and can show anyone that silly season theory has been common among the skeptical.

That the theory is simplistic is true enough and it is by design. The possibility of multi-factor approaches giving better insight has not been denied, but focused argument on a single factor has advantages over tangled commentaries invoking the interaction of multiple elements. At this stage, some standard elements may not be relevant and it seems best to test the limits of applying this new element before bringing back in excuses for the confusion we have seen in this subject.



The Blue Book data chart 1947-1969  
Y axis is number of ufo events per day

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