

J. Allen Hynek Dies; Led AF Investigation of UFOs

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J. Allen Hynek, the astronomer who took on what he described as a sprawling collection of "kooks, nuts, ding-a-lings and culties," when he agreed to head a U.S. Air Force investigation of unidentified flying objects years ago, has died.

The scientist and author who coined the phrase "close encounters of the third kind" to describe supposed confrontations with aliens from other worlds, was 75 and died at Memorial Hospital in Scottsdale, Ariz., on Sunday. Hynek had moved his Center for UFO Studies from Illinois to Arizona last year.

He was an esteemed scientist chosen in the late 1950s to head Operation Moonwatch, a volunteer network of astronomers around the world who were to undertake the tracking of American satellites yet to be launched. When the Soviet Union orbited Sputnik 1 on Oct. 4, 1957, a surprised Hynek managed to quickly mobilize his dozens of tracking stations around the world, and visual sightings of the tiny satellite's third-stage rocket began to be reported.

His network also led to the first, little-known American-Soviet en-



J. Allen Hynek

operation in space. The Soviets had not prepared a visual tracking network of their own and asked Hynek's team for help as Sputnik's radio signals began quickly to fade.

By February, 1958, after the Soviet achievement put an end to the international rivalry that contributed to the United States becoming the second and not the first nation in space, Hynek's crews were able to report accurate sightings

of Explorer 1, the 80-inch-by-6-inch satellite that marked the beginning of the U.S. satellite program.

Thus Hynek became an obvious choice to head Project Blue Book, an outgrowth of the hundreds of reports of UFO sightings that had been trickling into the Pentagon since 1947 when the Air Force began keeping records.

Hynek started his investigation by channeling both the "kooks" who often confused gossamer clouds with interstellar travelers and the scientific community for not taking some of those reports seriously enough.

A small, bearded man, Hynek led the investigation until 1965, concluding that more than 80% of the reported UFO sightings were explainable as natural phenomena but that the remaining 20% required further study.

The Air Force, however, concluded that there was no evidence to support the existence of any of the mysterious objects.

Disagreeing, Hynek founded his UFO studies center. He had not been active recently because of failing health, said Tina Christie, the center's administrative director. She did not elaborate on the nature of his illnesses.

In his 1972 book, "The UFO Experience," Hynek first used the phrase "close encounters of the third kind" to describe some of the investigations he had conducted into reports of creatures from other planets that supposedly had visited

earthlings.

Steven Spielberg, who used Hynek's dramatic words in 1977 as the title of his \$20-million film, said Wednesday through a spokesman that he had used the retired Northwestern University professor as a technical adviser on the picture and had even cast him in a cameo role. Hynek remained a good friend over the years, Spielberg said.

Asked in 1960 if he had personally seen a UFO, Hynek said that he had not. But, even if he had, he added, "I wouldn't report it unless I had witnesses. People would probably think I'd been involved in this no longer it finally got to me."