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## J. Allen Hynek, 75; astronomer who led Air Force probe of UFOs

By Burt A. Folkart  
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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 cultists" when he agreed to head a US 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 - died at the age of 75 Sunday at Memorial Hospital in Scottsdale, Ariz.

He had moved his Center for UFO Studies from Illinois to Arizona last year.

He was 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 mobilize his dozens of tracking stations around the world quickly, 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 cooperation 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 quickly began to fade.

Hynek's crews were able to report accurate sightings of Explorer 1 in February 1958, the 80-inch-by-6-inch satellite that marked the beginning of the US 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 chastising both the "kooks" who often confused gaseous clouds with interstellar travelers and the scientific community for not taking some of those reports seriously enough.

Hynek led the investigation until 1969, concluding that more than 80 percent of the reported UFO sightings were explainable as natural phenomena but that the remaining 20 percent required further study. He said that he stayed with the probe as long as he did to avoid being branded "a UFO nut."

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 Choate, the center's administrative director.

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.

Asked in 1980 if he had 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 so long it finally got to me."