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on whether UFO's really exist

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Contents for May 14, 1968 • Volume 32 Number 10



The running man at left is racing for his life. Carlton M. Thompson, 57, suffered a coronary seizure nearly three years ago. But instead of dropping by the wayside, he has been jogging back to health. Engineer Thompson does his running with a special group of men: all 35 of them have diseased hearts; all now exercise, with their physicians' consent, in a scientific program set up at California's San Diego State College; and all are doing well. For LOOK's report on a new kind of lifesaving, see pages 87-93.

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The extraordinary story
of the
half-million-dollar "trick"
to make
Americans believe
the Condon committee
was conducting
an objective investigation

FLYING SAUCER FIASCO

BY JOHN G. FULLER

A STRANGE SERIES of incidents in the University of Colorado Unidentified Flying Objects study has led to a near-mutiny by several of the staff scientists, the dismissal of two Ph.D's on the staff and the resignation of the project's administrative assistant.

The study, announced as a totally objective scientific investigation of one of the most puzzling phenomena of modern times, has already cost the taxpayer over half a million dollars. The committee is scheduled to release its report by the end of the year.

The announcement by the Secretary of Defense in October, 1966, that the Air Force had selected Dr. Edward U. Condon and the University of Colorado for the UFO research contract was welcomed both by skeptical observers and those convinced of the existence of flying saucers.

Maj. Donald Keyhoe and his National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, who were among the severest critics of the Air Force's study, publicly announced cautious support and offered NICAP's nationwide UFO reporting system to the new research group.

Condon, then 64, a distinguished physicist, former president of both the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Physical Society, had grappled with and subdued the House Un-American Activities Committee, and served as director of the U.S. Government's National Bureau of Standards from 1945 to 1951. His leadership appeared to promise pure scientific objectivity in the study. Only two details seemed to disturb some observers. Four out of the first five investigators appointed were psychologists. And Robert J. Low, project coordinator and key operations man in the study, held a master's degree in business administration (although his bachelor's degree was in electrical engineering). Some critics felt that more physical scientists were needed. Condon assured them that the staff would become more balanced, and later, it was.

The project staff received a minor jolt early in October of 1966, when the *Denver Post* published a story: CU AIDE SLAPS UFO STUDY. Low was quoted as saying that the UFO project "comes pretty close to the criteria of nonacceptability" as a university function.

But the massive problems of getting the project started left little time for debate over that statement. Briefings were held in which Dr. J. Allen Hynek, chairman of the Department of Astronomy of Northwestern University and one of the few scientists in the country who had given UFO's serious study, gave the staff the background information he had acquired in his 20 years as scientific consultant for the Air Force. Later, such authorities as Major Keyhoe and Richard Hall from NICAP, Maj. Hector Quintanilla, of the Air Force UFO study, and Dr. James McDonald, senior physicist at the Institute of Atmospheric Physics and professor in the De-

partment of Meteorology at the University of Arizona, addressed the group.

McDonald had carried out an extensive investigation on his own. After examining the hundreds of well-documented reports of sightings by military and airline pilots, radar operators, police, technical observers and articulate, rational laymen, McDonald rejected as highly unlikely such conventional explanations for UFO's as ball lightning (plasma), hallucinations, hoaxes and misinterpretations of natural phenomena. He concluded that "only abysmally limited scientific competence has been brought to the study of UFO's within Air Force circles in the past 15 years. Unfortunately, during all this time, the scientific community and the public were repeatedly assured that substantial scientific talent was being used. . . ."

From the beginning, the relationship between Dr. McDonald and Robert Low, the project coordinator, was abrasive. Low, who speaks softly, smoothly and guardedly, contrasts sharply with McDonald, who is intense and bluntly articulate.

The relationship between the Colorado group and NICAP was especially important. NICAP was large and well-organized, and could supply information on UFO sightings on a nationwide scale. NICAP hoped that the Colorado group would retain its scientific objectivity by concentrating on the estimated ten percent of "high credibility" cases, such as those Dr. McDonald was investigating.

The first major turbulence in the new project came early in February, 1967. Condon, burdened by heavy responsibilities in many public and educational projects, could not spend much time in the project offices. Low assumed the responsibilities for most of the decision-making. But on January 25, Condon, known for his breezy, anecdotal style, spoke before a chapter of Sigma Xi, the honorary scientific fraternity. The *Elmira, N.Y., Star-Gazette* reported:

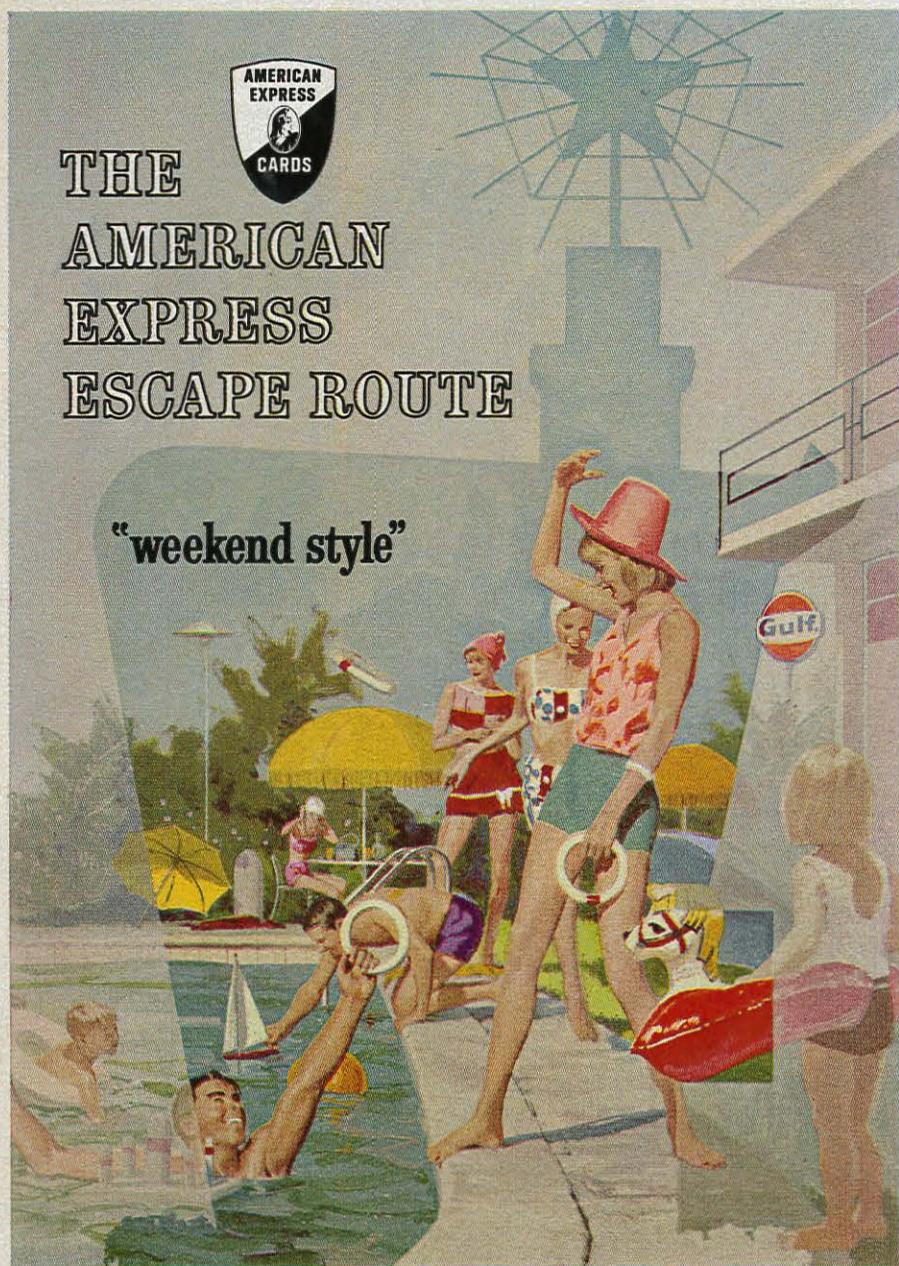
"Unidentified flying objects 'are not the business of the Air Force,' . . . Dr. Edward U. Condon said here Wednesday night. . . . Dr. Condon left no doubt as to his personal sentiments on the matter: 'It is my inclination right now to recommend that the Government get out of this business. My attitude right now is that there's nothing to it.' With a smile, he added, 'but I'm not supposed to reach a conclusion for another year. . . .'"

The story also quoted Condon as saying: "What we're always reduced to is interviewing persons who claim they've had some kind of experience. . . . I don't know of any cases where the phenomenon was still there after the person reports it . . . and it seems odd, but these people always seem to wait until they get home before they report what they saw."

Keyhoe knew of cases where "the phenomenon was still there after the person reported it," and where the observer didn't wait to get home

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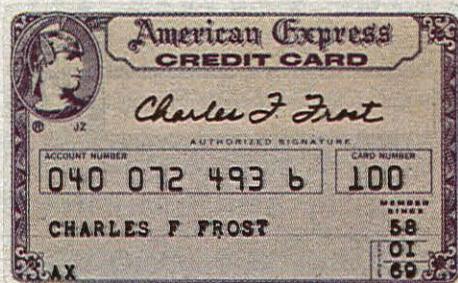
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SAUCER FIASCO CONTINUED

A startling memo from Robert Low said

before he reported it. He bristled. He knew that Condon had not yet investigated any field cases personally, nor had any members of the staff completed any meaningful research. The project was only three months old. "I have to admit," Keyhoe told David Saunders, a key staff member, "that I'm shocked by these statements. Is this a scientific investigation or isn't it?"

Condon wrote Keyhoe that some of his remarks had been taken out of context. NICAP then issued this statement: "Although we retain some reservations about the impressions of Dr. Condon's attitudes conveyed through some press accounts, we find no reason to go along with the skeptics who interpret the project merely as the latest gambit in an Air Force propaganda campaign. Having met most of the scientists involved, we are generally satisfied with their fair-mindedness and their thorough plans. . . ."

The NICAP cooperation made it possible to establish an Early Warning System, and staff investigators were now being dispatched for field reports. Saunders gave particular attention to field surveys, as well as to the development of a master casebook and staff discussions of major cases. Low was giving the staff members considerable leeway in the approach they were taking. Condon, with his office some distance away, did not appear frequently, and some of the staff felt that it was often frustrating to try to reach him. During this time, it seemed to some of the staff that several potentially interesting cases were turned down for investigation by Low for what were apparently specious reasons.

Another scientific investigator, Dr. Norman Levine, joined the project and immediately became aware of the strained atmosphere developing between Low and several members of the staff. Condon himself was heard to say that he wished the project could give the money back.

A senior member of the staff who was asked to make a speech before a teachers association began looking for specific details on the origin of the project. He was told that he might find some information in the open-files folder under the heading AIR FORCE CONTRACT AND BACKGROUND. The relaxed open-file system was part of a general overall policy to keep the project out of the cloak-and-dagger category. (In a later memo, Low said: "The key point to keep in mind, it seems to me, is that our own files are not secure, they are not confidential, they can't be kept confidential, nor should they be. . . . It is inconsistent with the purposes of a university to keep confidential any records of research activity—or any other records for that matter.")

The staff member found most of the material about the contract rather dull going, but one memo, written by Low to university officials on August 9, 1966, contained a few fresh details. The memo, labeled "Some Thoughts on the UFO Project," had been written before the contract was signed. In it, Low said: "... Our study would be conducted almost exclusively by non-believers who, although they couldn't possibly *prove* a negative result, could and probably would add an impressive body of evidence that there is no reality to the observations. The trick would be, I think, to describe the project so that, to the public, it would appear a totally objective study but, to the scientific community, would present the image of a group of non-believers trying their best to be objective, but having an almost zero expectation of finding a saucer. One way to do this would be to stress investigation, not of the physical phenomena, but rather of the people who do the observing—the psychology and sociology of persons and groups who report seeing UFO's. If the emphasis were put here, rather than on examination of the old question of the physical reality of the saucer, I think the scientific community would quickly get the message. . . . I'm inclined to feel at this early stage that, if we set up the thing right and take pains to get the proper people involved and have success in presenting the image we want to present to the scientific community, we could carry the job off to our benefit. . . ."

When Levine read the memo, he was disturbed by the word "trick" and the phrase about making the investigation "*appear* a totally objective study" to the public. Others on the staff had a similar reaction.

Many staff members were also disturbed by the news that Condon had decided to attend the June Congress of "Ufologists" in New York. This was a convention of far-out supporters of undocumented and highly colorful UFO sightings.

“the trick would be” to “appear” objective

On September 18, Condon, Low and Saunders met for the first time in many weeks. As a result of his reading of the memo, Saunders was deeply concerned about the negative approach to the UFO problem. It would be easy, he felt, to concentrate on the nut-and-kook cases and persuasively eliminate any serious consideration of the real problem.

The meeting went on for three hours. Low did most of the talking. Condon seemed tired. Low's position was that Saunders was sticking his nose into something that was none of his business. Condon's position was that he didn't understand what Saunders was talking about.

Saunders was led to believe that if by chance the Extra Terrestrial Intelligence (ETI) hypothesis was substantiated, the announcement would be sent by Condon directly to the Air Force and the President, and never be allowed to go to the public. This troubled him, because Saunders had been given a clear understanding that the report would go first to the National Academy of Sciences, then to the public and Air Force simultaneously. Saunders felt he could not let the problem drop. Another meeting was agreed to.

At this point, Keyhoe suddenly sent word that NICAP was going to take a strong stand against the Condon committee and no longer would supply material and reports. The reason, Keyhoe said, was a new speech made by Condon at the Atomic Spectroscopy Symposium at Gaithersburg, Md., on September 13, 1967. A report of the new Condon speech had already reached Dr. McDonald in a letter from a colleague at the University of Arizona, William S. Bickel, assistant professor of physics on the campus.

“... Dr. Condon's speech was funny and entertaining,” Bickel wrote. “But to me, it was also disappointing and surprising. Dr. Condon emphasized mostly funny things. He told of an offer made to him by a contactee, who, for a sizable sum deposited in the right bank, would introduce him to a UFO crew. ... He told how he tracked the case down and concluded

that it was very likely a hoax. ... My feelings about UFO's are similar to those of many people—I don't know what they are, I believe people are seeing real things, and I believe a scientific attack on the problem will solve the mystery—whatever they are. ... The net effect of Dr. Condon's talk was zero, if not negative. ...”

In reply to Bickel, McDonald wrote, “... The crackpots are so immediately recognizable that one need not waste any time at all on them. ... I fail to understand why a scientific group should be given an address by any member of the Colorado team on the topic of the crackpot fringe. ...”

Word came from Keyhoe that he was drafting a long letter to the Colorado study group, and NICAP would reconsider its cooperation only if the answers to a list of questions were satisfactory.

On September 27, the *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colo.) published this headline: UFO RESEARCH CHIEF AT CU DISENCHANTED. Condon was quoted as saying: “I'm almost inclined to think such studies ought to be discontinued unless someone comes up with a new idea on how to approach the problem. ... The 21st century may die laughing when it looks back on many things we have done. This [the UFO study] may be one.”

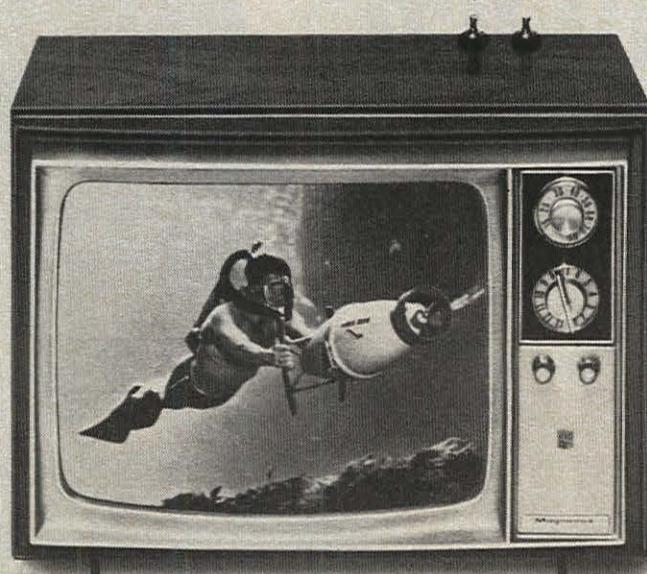
The majority of the staff began exploring several proposals, including the possibility of the entire staff resigning en masse or issuing a press release or a minority report. Another proposal was the establishment of an independent scientific group to explore the rational sighting reports and eliminate the crackpot-fringe static. There was general agreement that an objective study of the UFO problem should be made and that accurate and unbiased findings should reach the National Academy of Sciences, the public and the Air Force. A confrontation with Low and Condon was arranged. Condon expressed regret that his statements had appeared in the press. Several members of the staff told of their concern that the content and form of the final report would reflect what they now felt was

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Condon said to one critic: "You ought to be ruined professionally."

Condon's and Low's prejudice and would be unjustifiably negative. Staff members speculated that Condon was tired as well as disenchanted. He remained an enigma because the staff saw so little of him.

At an informal meeting in Denver on December 12, 1967, Saunders, Levine, McDonald and Hynek agreed that a new organization might be formed consisting only of professional-level members, designed to assure the continuation of intelligent UFO study regardless of whether the Condon report were negative or positive. After Hynek left, McDonald first became aware of Low's memo, and expressed his shock.

On January 19, 1968, Low phoned McDonald at the University of Arizona. McDonald reminded Low of the clearly negative tone of Condon's public statements over a period of time, including Condon's disturbing preoccupation with the crackpot elements. He also brought up Condon's failure to investigate personally significant field cases or to question any of the working staff who had been making a serious UFO study. McDonald stressed that he was not opposed to negative findings. What bothered him was that negative findings were already being clearly expressed by both Low and Condon. Low hung up in anger. McDonald prepared a long letter to Low to review his complaints. Low did not get around to reading the letter until February 6. In it, McDonald mentioned for the first time his concern about the memo, quoting to Low the phrases about "the trick." "I am rather puzzled by the viewpoints expressed there," McDonald wrote, "but I gather that they seem entirely straightforward to you, else this part of the record would, presumably, not be available for inspection in the open Project files. . . ."

Mrs. Mary Louise Armstrong, who had worked directly with Low as his administrative assistant, was in the office as Low finished reading the letter. Low exploded. He said that whoever gave the memo to McDonald should be fired immediately. Then he seemed to cool down.

On Wednesday, February 7, Saunders was summoned to Condon's office. Low and Condon were present. The questioning focused on the memo. Did Saunders know of it and know where it was kept? Saunders said that the memo was only part of the whole problem. It alone did not seem especially important, he felt. The broader issues of scientific integrity were at stake. Condon, furious that he had not immediately been informed that McDonald knew of the memo, told Saunders, "For an act like that, you ought to be ruined professionally."

Saunders countered by saying that Condon and Low seemed to be treating the symptoms rather than the disease. He reminded them of the efforts of the entire staff to get Low and Condon to modify their intractable stance. He reviewed the long sequence of events and reminded Low that he had blocked the investigation of one particularly startling UFO case. Low protested that the investigation on this was completed. No mention was made of any dissatisfaction with Saunders's work.

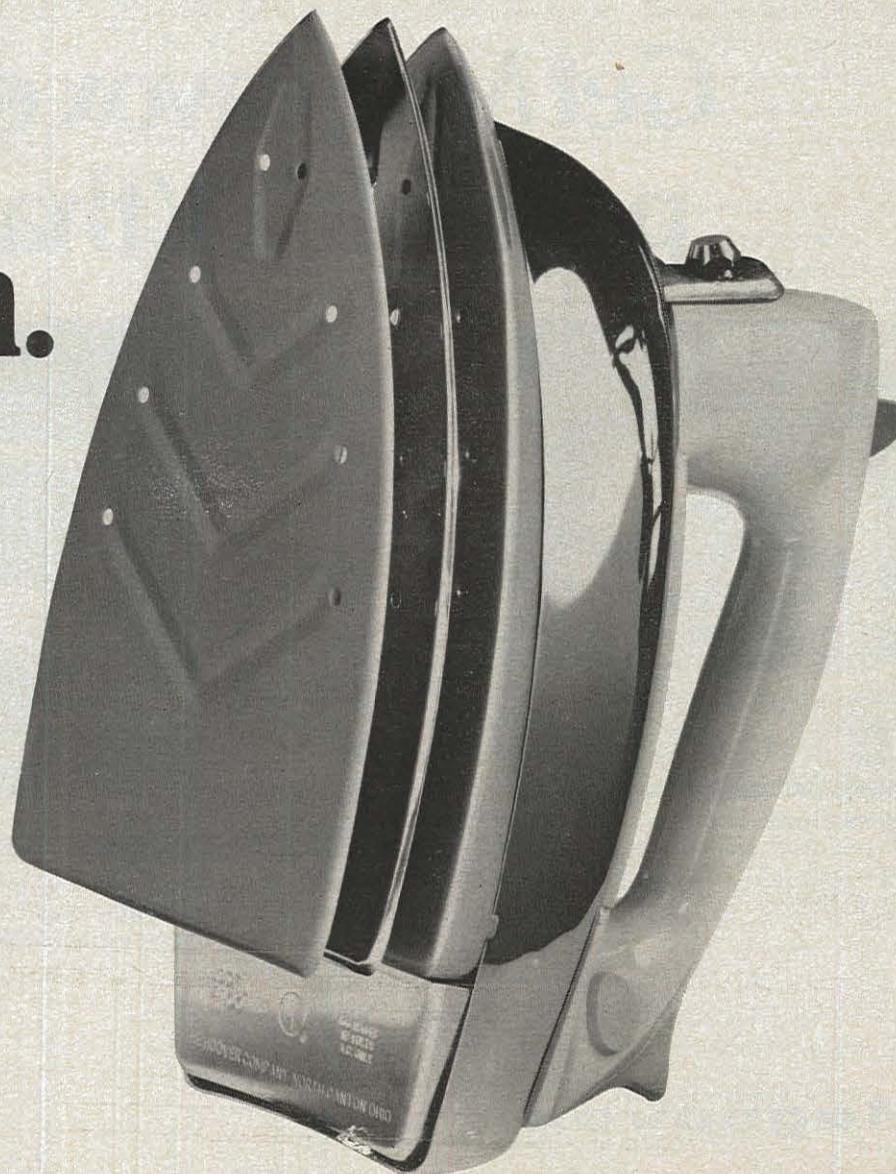
Dr. Levine was summoned while Saunders was still in Condon's office. Saunders offered to stay. Low rose from his chair and physically ushered him out the door. Levine was unnerved by the forcible ejection of Saunders. Again, the questioning went straight to the memo. Levine said that he was at the Denver meeting when the memo was given to McDonald. He understood there was nothing whatever confidential about the memo, and did not see anything wrong with the action. Condon asked why Levine had not brought the memo to him, and Levine said that Condon's public and private statements had indicated that there was little likelihood of effective communication. He told Condon that Low had slammed the door in his face when he brought up the handling by Low of an Edwards Air Force Base case, and recalled that Condon himself had suggested that Levine call in sick when he was scheduled to make a talk at Colorado's High Altitude Observatory.

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A statement from the director of NICAP

After 17 months, NICAP has broken with the University of Colorado UFO Project. We join LOOK and John G. Fuller in disclosing the facts as a public service.

At first, NICAP was dubious about an AF-financed project. After Dr. Condon pledged a fair study, we briefed scientists, trained field teams, loaned verified reports by pilots, aerospace engineers and other capable observers. Later, news stories quoted Condon as strongly biased, rejecting all evidence. When we found that barely one half of one percent of NICAP's cases were investigated (and none by Condon himself), we stopped transmitting. Administrator Low's disturbing proposals and the firing of Drs. Saunders and Levine led to our final break.

NICAP will submit plans to the President and Congress for a new official investigation, free of military or civilian agencies, with majority-vote controls, frequent public reports and other safeguards. We welcome suggestions (confidential, if desired) from scientists and other citizens seeking a full, open evaluation. Meantime, to offset the Colorado failure, our investigations will be intensified—NICAP is the world's largest UFO fact-finding organization, with over 300 scientific and technical advisers, trained investigators and thousands of nationwide members. To help increase factual evidence, we urge that all verified sightings be reported to us. Names will be kept confidential, if requested.

Maj. Donald E. Keyhoe, USMC, Ret., Director
National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena
1536 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036

Condon accused him of being disloyal and treacherous, and Levine replied that loyalty to a scientific goal might take precedence over personal loyalty. Condon asked why Levine didn't invite him to come over and investigate the important cases. Levine indicated that he did not feel it was his place to invite the chief scientist of the project over. The questioning lasted about an hour. Condon dismissed Levine abruptly.

Mrs. Armstrong had joined the project at its inception with no convictions whatever about UFO's. By February, 1967, she was convinced that the study was being gravely misdirected. When, on February 7, 1968, Condon told her that he was going to fire Saunders and Levine the next day, Mrs. Armstrong's first impulse was to resign immediately. But she then decided first to confront Condon with what she regarded as clear, unassailable documentation of the factors behind the disagreement and low morale of the staff.

She talked to Condon on February 22, 1968, at his office. She told him frankly that there appeared to be an almost unanimous lack of confidence in the project coordinator and his scientific direction of the project. She pointed out that Low had indicated little interest in talking to those who carried out the investigations or in reading their reports. She said that her long, close association with Low gave strong evidence that he was trying very hard to say as little as possible in the final report, and to say that in the most negative way possible. At Condon's request, she wrote a follow-up letter in which she added that the tone of the memo indicated that Low was not unbiased from the beginning. Condon then wrote her: "My position is that that letter is a confidential matter between the two of us and that for you to disclose it to anyone else would be gravely unethical." But after long consideration, Mrs. Armstrong felt that it was more important to the public interest to state her feelings clearly.

The others who left the project also felt they had an obligation to speak out, and when Condon failed to respond positively to his outspoken letter of criticism, McDonald brought the matter before the executive officers of the National Academy of Sciences in a vigorous written protest. Saunders and Levine cleared their desks at Woodbury Hall and left.

Asked about the near-mutiny in the investigating staff, Condon said that he would make no comment. Low stated that he had absolutely "zero comment" to make about the dismissals. Thurston E. Manning, vice president and dean of the faculties of the University of Colorado, delivered word through his secretary that he had nothing to say. Scott Tyler, in charge of public relations for the university, said that he had no comment.

The hope that the establishment of the Colorado study brought with it has dimmed. All that seems to be left is the \$500,000 trick. **END**

Send a can to a friend.



Everybody knows somebody who needs a more effective deodorant. We think we've got it. Mennen Pushbutton Deodorant. Spray for spray, Mennen delivers more of the protective ingredient than the aerosol deodorant your friend is probably using. Send him (or her) a can. If you'd rather, send us a dollar and we'll send the can. Delivered in a plain brown wrapper. They'll never know who to thank.

"Send A Can" Offer,
P.O. Box PB-68-L, Kenvil, N.J. 07847

I know somebody who needs Mennen Pushbutton Deodorant. Here is a dollar. Will you send a can to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____