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## HEADLINE PERSONALITY

## Fearless Physicist

## Tackles Mystery of UFOs

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Staff Writer

A man who has never seen a flying saucer and neither believe nor disbelieves in them is about to tackle the intriguing mystery of the UFOs.

UFO stands for "unidentified flying object," which is the official designation for what ordinary folk call flying saucers. Recurring UFO "sightings" have been making life miserable for the Air Force since 1947.

Last Thursday, with an almost audible sigh of relief, the Air Force signed a contract with the University of Colorado and tossed the UFOs into the lap of one of Colorado's most distinguished faculty members, Dr. Edward Uhler Condon.

## 15-Month Contract

Condon is a stocky, crew-cut, 64-year-old physicist who has never run away from either a mystery or a controversy. Since there is plenty of both in the flying saucer issue, Condon is likely to have an interesting 15 months—the period covered by the \$313,000 Air Force contract.

To observers of the Washington scene, it will be interesting to watch the tough-minded, often iconoclastic Condon deal with the predominantly anti-saucer Air Force on the one hand and fervently pro-saucer groups like "NICAP" on the other.

NICAP—the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena—is the Washington-based organization headed by retired Marine Maj. Donald E. Keyhoe that has been the worst thorn in the Air Force's side on the saucer issue. Already, while hailing Condon's appointment as a step in the right direction, NICAP is making noises that his scientific inquiry may be "superficial."



FULL NAME — Edward Uhler Condon.

CLAIM TO FAME—Named to head scientific inquiry into flying saucers.

HOME—Boulder, Colo.

BIRTHDAY—March 2, 1902.

EDUCATION—A.B. and Ph.D., University of California.

JOBS—Director, National Bureau of Standards, 1945-51, Director of Research, Corning Glass Co., 1951-54, Member, National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, 1945-51, Professor of Physics, University of Colorado, 1963.

FAMILY—Wife, Emilie Honzik (married 1922), three children.

HOBBIES—Reading, politics.

This is not likely to happen if Condon gets his way. He has been promised a "free hand" by the Air Force—including access to all pertinent secret information—and his record indicates clearly that he will blow a loud whistle if the Air Force tries any funny business.

The apparent clearance of Condon by the Air Force for secret-data access is the latest chapter in an interesting tale going back to 1947—ironically and coincidentally the birth-year of the modern flying-saucer uproar.

## Thomas Spread Blaze

At the close of World War II the "atom spy" furor swept through Washington like a prairie fire. One who seized a firebrand and helped spread the blaze a little farther was Rep. J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey, head of the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Condon, head of the National Bureau of Standards under Secretary of Commerce Henry A. Wallace in the Truman administration, found himself an early target of the Thomas committee. He was labeled by one committee member "a security risk and a weak link in our atomic security chain."

Rep. Chet Holifield (D-Calif.), now chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy and then one of its members, took the floor of the House to blast "rumor-mongering character assassins (who should) put up or shut up."

With characteristic good humor masking his innate combativeness, Condon replied to the Thomas committee charges, "If it is true that I am one of the weakest links . . . that is very gratifying and the country can feel absolutely safe, for I am completely reliable, loyal, conscientious and devoted to the interests of my country. . ."

One of the charges against Condon in 1947-48 was that he was a member of the executive committee of the American-Soviet Science Society. Another was that his wife, who was born in what is now Czechoslovakia, had "interesting" associations with people the Thomas group regarded as unsavory.

## Was A Reporter

A particularly far-fetched charge against Condon was that he had attended a communist meeting in Berkeley, Calif., in 1919 in the guise of a reporter for the old Oakland

Enquirer. Condon's reply was that he was in fact a reporter and had been assigned to cover the meeting.

Condon's early training in the journalistic College of Hard Knocks—including a stint on the Oakland Tribune—may have conditioned him for the rough-and-tumble of the postwar "security-risk" era: his troubles, which culminated in his resignation as Bureau of Standards director in 1951, foreshadowed the J. Robert Oppenheimer case several years ago.

After Oppenheimer was put through the Atomic Energy Commission's meat-grinder in a cause celebre of the mid-'50s, the frail and gentle scientist appeared badly injured by the experience. Condon, his bulldog jaw set against friend and foe alike, never seemed to show a bruise from his ordeal.

Following his departure from the Bureau of Standards, Condon headed research activities for Corning Glass Co., but lost his Navy security clearance in 1954. He blamed Vice President Richard M. Nixon for this—justifiably or not—and, unforgivingly, when Nixon was defeated for governor of California in 1962 Condon issued a statement congratulating the people of that state on their discernment.

At present Condon is himself embroiled in a state political campaign—as candidate for regent of the University, an elective office in Colorado. He is running as a Democrat, and has received a ringing editorial endorsement from "The Nation," which may or may not count for much in Colorado.

## Seeks Atom Smasher

Condon also is lobbying enthusiastically for the biggest single piece of Federal scientific "pork" presently available: A \$375 million atom-smasher which the Johnson

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Many years ago, in one of the great scientific concil-

dences of all time, Condon and a Russian scientist named George Gamow independently discovered the explanation for the strange behavior of radioactive atoms in their spontaneous "decay" and release of energy. This was in the 'twenties period when atomic physics was a purely intellectual exercise with no apparent useful applications.

To carry the coincidence one step farther, Gamow subsequently came to the United States, and both men now live in the same pleasant town of Boulder, half an hour's drive by freeway from the center of Denver.

For a man whose scientific life has been closely linked to atomic energy, it was appropriate that Condon should have been born at Alamogordo, N.Mex., near where the first nuclear device was exploded in 1945. He was born March 2, 1902, and was given the middle name "Uler" after his mother's family.

Condon attributes his determination to pursue a scientific career to the influence of a well-beloved teacher. He won his degrees—bachelor of arts and doctor of philosophy—at the University of California, newspapering in the side to help pay his way.

#### Recalls Strange Firing.

He recalls fondly the experience of being fired off the copy desk of the Oakland Tribune for writing an incorrect headline on an obituary of a prominent local man. Several days later the head of the copy desk encountered Condon on the street and asked why he hadn't been showing up for work.

"You fired me," Condon reminded his erstwhile boss.

"Oh, forget it," the slot man rejoined, "when you're fired like that you're just supposed to take the rest of the day off and come back in the next day."

Despite this sort of comforting job security, Condon decided to go ahead with a life of science, which was to seem precarious indeed in later years. But if he had his ups and downs on the Washington roller-coaster, Condon never lacked the esteem of his colleagues.

He has been, among many eminent things, president of the American Physical Society, and in 1955 of the American Association for the Advance-

ment of Science. But while climbing onward and upward in science, Condon has never completely lost his love for the printed page, as both producer and consumer.

Condon is editor of "Reviews of Modern Physics," a scientific journal of high repute, a member of the publications board of the American Institute of Physics and chairman of the advisory board of "International Science and Technology," a highbrow monthly magazine circulated among scientifically oriented business leaders. He reads avidly; reading is his principal hobby.

On Friday Condon was in New York attending a meeting of the governing board of the American Institute of Physics. He took time off to hold a press conference on the new flying saucer inquiry. For

more than an hour he fielded questions, some searching, some hostile, some pretty stupid, and gave every indication of relishing the experience.

Some of the reporters, familiar with Condon's towering scientific reputation and knowing the background of the saucer controversy, wondered aloud why he would touch the issue with a 10-meter pole. His answer was simple: It's an intriguing mystery that hasn't really been looked into thoroughly.

But considering his own adventures in the wonderland of Washington, hadn't Condon had enough traumatic experiences for one lifetime? "Not traumatic," he replied. "Unpleasant, perhaps, but not traumatic."

"Anyway, I think those times have gone forever."

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