

Boulder, Colo.

## Libel suit may develop from UFO hassle

Two former members of the University of Colorado group investigating unidentified flying objects for the Air Force reported this month that they are considering a libel action against Edward U. Condon, director of the UFO project.

A suit was to have been filed early this month by the pair, David R. Saunders and Norman E. Levine, in the Boulder (Colo.) County state court, when *Look* magazine hit the newsstands with a story that recounted alleged dissatisfaction and disagreements within the Colorado group that led to the firing of Saunders and Levine by Condon.

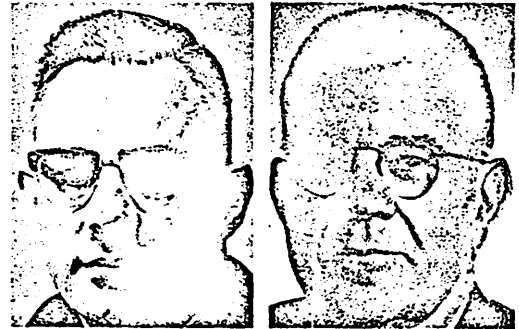
Saunders and Levine say their suit against Condon has been delayed, and there is a "small chance" that it will not be brought at all. Condon has protested to *Look* magazine, called for a meeting with the editor, and says he "would not rule out the possibility" of legal action himself.

Saunders, a psychologist, was co-principal investigator with Condon, and Levine, an electrical engineer, worked with Condon on radar and plasma-physics aspects of UFO's.

Both Saunders and Levine had criticized Condon for taking what they call an "unscientific" approach. Also, while still a part of the research group, they had sent some documents gathered in the course of the investigation to outside scientists for comment. That act caused Condon to fire them and issue a press release describing them as "incompetent" researchers.

"There was no reason or justification for this kind of language," says Saunders.

Levine says: "Part of my idea of doing a scientific job was communicating with other scientists . . . Condon decided he didn't like this correspondence. I don't think it was because the information was not going to be published until later."



UFO study erupts into libel action threat: Norman E. Levine (left) and David R. Saunders (center) may sue Edward U. Condon (right) for allegedly calling them "incompetent" when he fired them from the Air Force-sponsored Univ. of Colorado UFO investigation

The University of Colorado at Boulder, Colo., was awarded a 15-month contract late in 1966 by the Air Force in its first major scientific effort to get to the bottom of the UFO mystery. Before its report could be made, Condon's group ran out of time and was granted an extension and extra money to finish the job, for a total of \$496,000.

The report is now due to be delivered to the National Academy of Sciences in September for an evaluation before it is passed on to the Air Force and public.

The Condon report will contain a detailed analysis of the many UFO sightings that have been made, a discussion of the natural atmospheric phenomena, such as ball lightning and other plasma effects, that have been offered as possible explanations of the origins of UFO's, and an attempt to correlate visual sightings with radar evidence of UFO's, if and when such evidence is found.

One of the outside scientists with whom Levine corresponded was James E. McDonald of the University of Arizona's Institute of At-

mospheric Physics, an outspoken critic of Condon. In a recent speech before a Canadian aeronautical society, McDonald said: "I must state that I have become quite disappointed with the lack of scientific vigor with which that [Condon] group has prosecuted its study, and I am disturbed by the frequency with which its director has publicly indicated that he had already taken a position (negative in tone) long before the working staff had assembled adequate data to justify taking any position."

McDonald is inclined toward the extraterrestrial explanation of UFO's, the hypothesis that the objects are vehicles from other planets. But he draws a line between legitimate scientific conjecture about the hypothesis and first-person accounts from individuals who claim to have been inside the vehicles and met the crews. McDonald accuses Condon of having rejected serious consideration of the extraterrestrial hypothesis early in the investigation, while at the same time showing an "evident preoccupation with the cultist and crackpot

type of UFO accounts...."

Levine maintains that a lot of evidence points toward the extraterrestrial origin of UFO's, and says that, "If you ignore the extraterrestrial hypothesis, you are ignoring the most significant part of the problem."

In discussing the report and the findings of his group, Condon refuses to say whether they lean toward an extraterrestrial explanation or away from one. Condon received strong support recently from J. Thomas Ratchford, the Air Force project scientist who handled the investigation contract for the Air Force Office of Scientific Research.

He expressed great confidence in Condon's judgment and vigorously denied any suggestion that the Air Force might be displeased with Condon or his work. In fact, he said the Air Force expects that much new knowledge will stem from work subcontracted by Condon to investigate various aspects of the UFO problem.

For example, the Raytheon Co.'s Autometric division at Alexandria, Va., is studying photogrammetric needs of a UFO investigation. Stanford Research Institute, Palo Alto, Calif., is conducting studies of anomalous radar and optical propagation under conditions of clear-air turbulence.

Plasma studies are going forward at the University of California, La Jolla; and the National Center for Atmospheric Research at Boulder. The Ford Motor Co. research and development laboratory is analyzing automobile ignition failures (which have been a feature of many UFO sighting reports).

One reason the University of Colorado was selected by the Air Force was that it has access to a broad spectrum of scientific expertise in atmospheric research through the many agencies concentrated in its vicinity at Boulder.

The Air Force felt that Condon was the right man to direct the investigation since he is a physicist of wide experience and reputation, and a former director of the National Bureau of Standards.

McDonald has presented his criticism of Condon and the investigation to the National Academy of Sciences, and has also suggested another UFO investigation, entirely divorced from the Air Force, be conducted.

By coincidence, such a study is being set up by the Institute of Aerospace Studies at the University of Toronto.

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