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resigned last August to return to Los Alamos, succeeds H. Guyford Stever as URA president. Stever had been NSF's director from 1972 to 1976; in his last two years there he was also President Ford's science adviser.

President Reagan's nomination of Richard S. Nicholson, acting deputy director at the National Science Foundation the past two years, to be NSF's assistant director for mathematical and physical sciences was approved by the Senate on 1 August, just before Congress left Washington for its traditional August recess. An associate professor of chemistry at Michigan State University before coming to NSF in 1970, Nicholson knows the Foundation well, serving in top jobs and earning major awards—most notably, the Presidential Distinguished Rank, the government's highest civil service honor, conferred by Reagan at a White House ceremony in 1982. Nicholson succeeds Marcel Bardon, who was acting head of the mathematics and physical sciences directorate since 1982. Bardon continues to be director of NSF's physics division, a post he held concurrent with the principal job in the directorate.

in brief

Norman E. Phillips, professor at the University of California at Berkeley and former dean of the college of chemistry, has been appointed associate director and head of the materials and molecular research division at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory. He succeeds Alan Searcy, who left the post last July to devote more time to his research interests.

Charles R. Newsom, formerly of the physics department of UCLA, has joined the physics and astronomy de-

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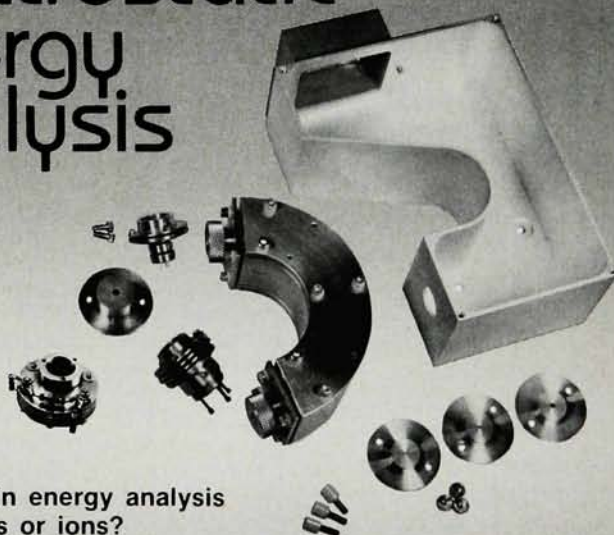
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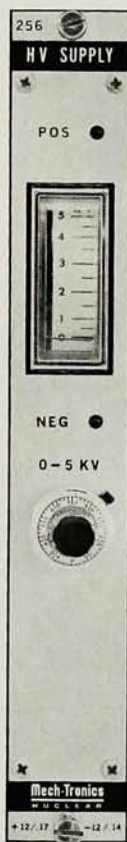
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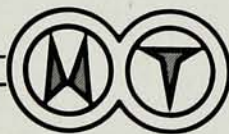
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partment of the University of Iowa as an assistant professor of physics. His research is in experimental intermediate- and high-energy physics.

W. Arthur Porter, director of Texas A&M's Texas Engineering Experiment Station, became the president of the Houston Area Research Center on 1 January 1985. He succeeds **David Gottlieb** of the University of Houston, who had been serving as interim president of the Center.

West Georgia College has made the following appointments to its physics department: **Jacobson A. Petterson**, formerly assistant professor of physics at the New Mexico Institute of Technology, has been appointed associate professor and chairman of the department;

Roger D. Chelf, formerly assistant professor at the University of North Alabama, has been appointed assistant professor.

Nader C. Dutta, formerly a research physicist with Shell Development Company in Houston, has joined ARCO Resources Technology in Plano, Texas, as research director of the geoseismic interpretation group.

The UCLA physics department has made the following appointments: **Sergio Ferrara**, formerly of the theory division at CERN, will join the department; and **John Wheatley**, of Los Alamos National Laboratory, has been named a University of California-Los Alamos Fellow, associated with the Center for Material Science and the physics division at Los Alamos.

obituaries

William Weber Buechner

William Weber Buechner, professor emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, died on 12 March 1985 after a long illness.

Buechner was born in Vallejo, California in 1914 and received his BSc in 1935 and his PhD in 1939, both from MIT. He worked with the later Robert J. Van de Graaff in the 1930s on the development of the first large Van de Graaff generator at the Round Hill Estate in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts. In 1937 this machine was moved to MIT, where it remained in service until 1951. It was moved in 1955 to Boston's Museum of Science, where it is now the centerpiece of lightning displays.

In the late 1930s, the goal of the Van de Graaff group was to study nuclear reactions and to construct precision equipment for this purpose. However, when World War II began, this work was set aside. The High Voltage Laboratory then, in an all-out effort, developed high-voltage x-ray generators for the US Navy. In 1942, Buechner was appointed associate director of the Laboratory, under Van de Graaff.

After the war, the Laboratory turned back to the work for which it was constructed, nuclear physics. Originally under Van de Graaff's directorship, and later under Buechner's, the Laboratory pioneered precision nuclear-energy-level measurements, using the Van de Graaff generator and the magnetic spectrometer. At the time, most nuclear-physics laboratories favored the cyclotron, which could produce higher energies than the Van de Graaff generator. The tables began to turn, however, as physicists recognized the



BUECHNER

need for the precision measurements only the Van de Graaff could provide. The work coming from Buechner's group contributed in a substantial way to this change in attitude.

Buechner had a large number of scientific contacts around the world and he attracted a large number of people from foreign lands to the High Voltage Laboratory. These visitors were welcomed to the Lab and very gracefully received at Buechner's home in Arlington, where he and his wife, Christina, gave many parties. A large number of the foreign visitors—and for that matter, American visitors—went back to their home institutions and started new groups to study nuclear energy levels. Many of them also made repeat visits to the group at MIT.

Buechner was a true cosmopolitan, and so is Christina Buechner. They have traveled extensively: They spent three months in India, where Buechner