

ERNEST WILMOT GUPTILL

1919-1976

The death, by drowning, of Ernest Guptill occurred on March 20, 1976. An expert sailor, he was the victim of an accident, highly improbable and wholly unexpected, and therefore very tragic. The immediate reaction was one of refusing to believe that he could have lost his life on the water — and then came the conviction that if it were true a great and irreparable loss had come to all who knew him.

Dr. Guptill was born in 1919 on Grand Manan Island, into the family of a fisherman. His parents believed in the value of a college education and managed to see all the children, three in number, graduate from universities. After Honours Physics at Acadia, Ernest Guptill did advanced work at the University of Western Ontario and McGill University — at McGill he earned his Ph.D. The war was on during most of this period so his research interests were naturally of a practical sort; he became an expert in waveguide theory and construction, and succeeded in inventing (along with Dr. W.H. Watson) a type of slotted wave antennae of great simplicity and efficiency; it is still in wide use.

Many of his published papers record straightforward measurements of physical properties; his experiments were always examples of elegant and original techniques. His ability to make difficult measurements with the equipment "on hand" elicited the envy and admiration of his colleagues. His greatest satisfaction was in doing an experiment to investigate some effect which everyone took for granted but which no one took the trouble to measure or check. His work on contact potentials and the electric fields in accelerating copper was of this nature.

For ten years Dr. Guptill was Head of the Physics Department at Dalhousie University. This was a period of rapid growth involving the solution of many problems. The fine leadership provided during this crucial period has been of essential service to the Department. He has served on important committees of the National Research Council and was a member of the Board and Executive of the Nova Scotia Research Foundation.

Everyone who knew Dr. Guptill observed that as the years passed his skill as a teacher steadily increased. It was his ambition to do this task as well as possible and he disciplined his life to achieve this end. Beyond a doubt he was uniquely gifted for this role and was at his best, and getting better, at the time of his death.

W.J. Archibald