

J.H.L. JOHNSTONE

The many friends of Dr. J.H.L. Johnstone were sad to learn of his sudden death while he was holidaying in Mexico last winter (1972-73). Prior to his death he appeared to be in good health and at 83 still possessed the physical vigour, the alert mind and the progressive ideas which characterized his whole life. We expected him to have a lifetime at least as long as his mother's — 106 years.

Dr. Johnstone, a pupil of Pictou Academy, received his master of science degree at Dalhousie and earned his Ph.D. at Yale University in 1916. During the same year he joined the armed forces, fought in France as a captain of the Royal Canadian Engineers and with the British forces at Salonika. He was mentioned in dispatches and returned to Dalhousie a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 1919.

Here he started a fruitful career as a university teacher and researcher. He rose from the rank of instructor in 1919 to full professor in 1926. His academic career was again interrupted when World War II broke out. The Royal Canadian Navy was faced with many scientific problems of which at the start of the war the German magnetic mine was the most menacing.

On February 21, 1940, Dr. Johnstone and his colleague Dr. G.H. Henderson were called upon to find a defence against this weapon. They turned one of their university rooms into a naval research laboratory and thus laid the seed of the now firmly rooted Defence Research Establishment.

Dr. Johnstone's diary of those days, sketchy notes jotted down in the midst of feverish activity, show that within 15 days an instrument had been built to test the magnetic state of a ship. A week later the first ship to be protected against magnetic mines, the Fleur-de-Lis, was being wired at the Halifax Shipyards to the specifications of the two professors.

When Dr. Henderson left for England, Dr. Johnstone carried on by himself. His department flowed over to the now demolished Naval Ordnance building at the Dockyards and its staff grew rapidly. Most of the work was done in Halifax, but Sydney was also wiring ships against magnetic mines, so this involved much commuting between the two ports. Work on a defence against acoustic mines was also effective and Dr. Johnstone tackled many other scientific problems facing the navy. By the end of 1941 his Naval Research Establishment was a vigorous youngster.

He resumed his academic career after the war, first as head of Dalhousie's department of physics, later also as dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

From 1958 on, although in semi-retirement, Dr. Johnstone played a major role during the construction of the Sir James Dunn Science Building and the new quarters for the Nova Scotia Research Foundation.