ALEC T. STEWART, FRSC

Jonathan Ewart Blanchard
1921-2003

Jonathan Ewart Blanchard died in Halifax on August 22, 2003 after a long struggle with Parkinson's Disease. His death is a great loss for he was a leader in geophysics exploration and a pioneer in creating connections between university research and practical benefits.

Ewart Blanchard was born in Truro Nova Scotia on March 22, 1921. He attended Truro schools and went to Dalhousie University, graduating with a BSc in 1940. He then worked as an Assistant Forecaster in the Meteorological Service of the Department of Transport for two years before joining the Royal Canadian Navy. He served in convoy duties in the North Atlantic on the deck of H.M.C.S. Sault St. Marie, a Corvette, and retired as Lieutenant Commander RCNVR in 1945. Returning to university he did graduate work in geophysics at the University of Toronto, 1945-1948, receiving an MA in 1947 and PhD in1952. In the summers of his geophysics studies, he served as Party Chief for Conwest Exploration Company and again as Party Chief for the Newmont Exploration Company where he was involved in the development of new geophysical exploration methods. In 1949 he became a Lecturer in the Physics Department of Dalhousie University and also a Director of the Geophysics Division of the Nova Scotia Research Foundation. For the Foundation he developed and adapted methods of geophysical exploration to mineral exploitation in Nova Scotia. After receiving his PhD in 1952 his service to Dalhousie was recognized by steady promotion and he became Professor of Geophysics in 1964. In 1966 Dr. Blanchard resigned his formal academic position at Dalhousie - though never his interest in the University and the Physics Department - to be appointed Vice-President, and then in 1968, President, of the Nova Scotia Research Foundation. He led and managed the Foundation for nearly two decades.

During his busy career as a university professor and as President of the Nova Scotia Research Foundation, Dr. Blanchard also served on many national and international committees: for the National Research Council he was a long term member of the Associate Committee on Geophysics and as well served on a Scholarship Committee. For the Geological Survey of Canada he was for many years a member of the National Advisory Committee on Geological Sciences. He was a member of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada and also served many years on the Canadian Committee of U.N.E.S.C.O. He was elected to Fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada in 1968 and, near the end of his Presidency of the Nova Scotia Research Foundation; he served on their Board and on the Advisory Board of its successor, Innovacorp.

In his professional science career - mostly at Dalhousie - Dr. Blanchard used many different geophysical techniques and adapted them imaginatively to the Nova Scotian situation. For many summers he led both undergraduate and graduate students into the field to make measurements of the geophysical properties of the region. There the students learned to take great care in observing and recording the data; for Professor Blanchard demanded precision and high accuracy in the work. The students also learned something about frugality: in the search for lodging there was a similar need for care and prudence. On one occasion his students were unable to find a night's lodging for the $14 allowance proscribed - there was none and so had to get authorization to spend $16! His seismic research yielded much new and interesting technical knowledge about the thickness and stress in the earth's crust underneath Nova Scotia. He also succeeded in mapping the depth to the Mohorovicic Discontinuity at the continental margin, a problem often attempted but seldom achieved. His gravity measurements led to a number of industrially interesting results including the establishment of a new cement industry near Brookfield N.S. The surveys also identified locations of salt and potash deposits.

The Nova Scotia Research Foundation, under his guidance, changed from being entirely a government funded research organization to an organization closely related to the research needs of Nova Scotian industry and in large part funded by industry for research of direct value to them. He increased the staff number from about 50 to more than 130 and the industrial funding from about 30% to 70%. The development of offshore instruments and tools led to the deep towed sub-bottom profiling system sold worldwide. His creation of the Center for Offshore Technology and slip-ring technology became Focal Technologies Inc. and the magnetic coupling devices were patented and sold by Nova Magnetics Ltd. The Nova Scotia Research Foundation itself became Innovacorp.

Dr. Blanchard's management skills came from his deep interest and understanding of people. On one occasion, at a B&B in Cape Breton he discovered the Manager's interest in the people of Nova Scotia - "who married who", what they did for a living, who was related to whom - and for the next few hours they must have named half the population of Nova Scotia. With this interest and empathy he could encourage the latent abilities of his employees, his students and his friends. His insight allowed him to energize people and of course his friendships were rich and warm. His many friends were very pleased and congratulated him heartily on the occasion of Dalhousie honouring him with a Doctor of Laws honoris causa.

Humour played a large role in his interactions. He liked mental puzzles that he tried on students and friends. One that he particularly liked concerned a young student, Peter, who, after seeing his girlfriend home, took the first street car that came along back to his house that was exactly opposite hers on the city belt line. Street cars travelled both clockwise and anticlockwise around the belt line with the same average speed and same scheduled time between cars. Since he took the first car in either direction and at random times, Peter could not understand why he caught the clockwise car about twice as often as the anticlockwise car.

Ewart Blanchard enjoyed skating at the Dalhousie rink and often spent a pleasant evening with skating friends. Gradually however his friends saw less and less of him because he seemed to spend much time skating with a young lady, Mary Sandilands. They married in 1958 and have two children.

Ewart Blanchard made lasting contributions to his profession and to Canada and enriched very much the lives of his family and many friends.

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(Author's title given as of the time of writing)