OBITUARIES

HARRY WEXLER—1911–1962

In addition to the loss to the U.S. Weather Bureau where he was Director of Meteorological Research the death of Dr. Harry Wexler at Boston on 11 August has robbed glaciology and international science of a stimulating leader.

He was born at Fall River, Massachusetts, and read mathematics at Harvard where he graduated in 1932. In 1939 he received the Sc.D. of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology after research there and with the U.S. Weather Bureau, which he joined in 1934. After a spell as Assistant Professor in Meteorology at the University of Chicago in 1940, he returned to the Weather Bureau in 1941. He served in the Army Air Force from 1942 to 1946 first as a senior instructor in meteorology, then as a research executive. In 1946 he returned to the Weather Bureau as head of its research programme, in which capacity he was responsible for a large expansion of meteorological research which is still continuing.

The broad scope of Wexler's research interests led to his appointment as Chief Scientist of the United States I.G.Y. Antarctic Programme. This in turn led to his increasing interest in problems of Antarctic glaciology, since his meteorological interests extended to the whole water cycle of the planet, and included the interactions between the atmosphere, oceans and Antarctic Ice Sheet. His glaciological publications at this time included theoretical studies of the temperature distribution in ice sheets and ice shelves, as well as studies of the mass budget of the Antarctic Ice Sheet. In the latter field his discussion of bottom melting of ice shelves and of the possibility of explaining current changes of sea-level by the changes in the Antarctic ice mass were valuable. He was also one of the first scientists to foresee the use of satellites for weather observation, and he encouraged his staff to study the value of sea ice information obtained from TIROS satellites, a field in which the first results show great promise for future years, both as a research tool and as a guide to operations of polar ships. Under the auspices of the World Meteorological Organization, Wexler was taking a leading

part in planning a "World Weather Watch", a co-operative project of world-wide scope in which satellite observations of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. would be pooled in order to provide improved synoptic weather reports for the benefit of all countries.

The above summary shows clearly a dominant feature of Wexler's very active life, his ability to think on a grand scale and not to be daunted by the size or complexities of the problems with which he was faced. In addition, he believed in pushing forward new ideas as a stimulus to research even though some of these may have been open to criticism on scientific grounds. This combination, together with a friendly and open personality, made him a stimulating director of research.

In addition to the scientific value of international co-operation, Wexler also had a genuine interest in the human importance of international contacts. He played a major part in starting an international Weather Centre at the "Little America V" station during the I.G.Y., and he helped to extend the idea into an exchange of scientists between the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. Antarctic stations which is still continuing. After the I.G.Y. his Antarctic interest continued as the alternate delegate to S.C.A.R. from the U.S.A., in spite of his many interests in other international programmes in meteorological and space science fields.

His contributions to science brought recognition in many ways. He was a vice-president of the American Meteorological Society and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His friends, both in the United States and in many other countries, are finding that his warm personality and stimulating views are greatly missed. Although he knew that the condition of his heart was not satisfactory he continued working on his many projects until his unexpected death. He is survived by a wife and two daughters.

G. DE Q. ROBIN

VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON—1879–1962

VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON was born of Icelandic parents in Arnes, Manitoba, on 3 November 1879. His death in Hanover, New Hampshire, on 26 August 1962 ends a remarkable career devoted to the understanding and development of the polar regions. Active to the last, Stefansson had served from 1947 as Arctic consultant to Dartmouth College. The Stefansson Collection of polar literature, one of the largest polar libraries in the world, had been acquired by the college. He completed a first draft of his autobiography only the week before he died.

The interest and the energy which kept Stefansson at his desk seven days a week in recent years were a characteristic of his Arctic explorations and of his subsequent career as author, lecturer, adviser to government and industry, and collector of polar literature. A graduate of the University of Iowa, he went on to read comparative religion and anthropology at Harvard. Stefansson spent ten winters and thirteen summers in the Arctic between 1906 and 1918. He commanded the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913–18, which explored a vast area and discovered four sizeable islands. He was one of the few anthropologists who, upon finding primitive groups who had never even seen a white man, was able to speak with them in their own tongue. Largely because he was an untiring recorder with unusual powers of observation, and because he lived with the Eskimos as one of them, Stefansson's anthropological writings are scholarly and unique.

His contribution to glaciology was indirect but far-reaching. Though each of his expeditions had specific research objectives, Stefansson's lifelong crusade was to convince men that the polar regions were not wastelands but areas holding great promise for science and for commercial enterprise. His independence of mind led him to reject the entrenched belief that the Arctic environment was hostile, and to champion, when still unorthodox, the feasibility of polar aviation and of submarine navigation through Arctic seas. In attacking the psychological barriers to living and working in polar lands, Stefansson did much to pave the way for