

## OBITUARY

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### Dr GÜNTHER BÖHNECKE

(1896-1981)

As announced in the *International Hydrographic Bulletin* for August, 1981, Dr BÖHNECKE, first president of the Deutsches Hydrographisches Institut, died on 12 April 1981 in his 85th year.

Günther BÖHNECKE was born on 5 September 1896 in Berlin. After studying geography and oceanography in his native city he concluded his studies with a doctoral thesis on the hydrography of the North Sea. He was then appointed as an assistant at the Institut für Meereskunde of the University of Berlin. It was this Institute which gave impetus to the great German *Meteor* expedition of 1925-27, and Günther found a place onboard in the team of twelve scientists.

This expedition had as its prime objective the investigation of the circulation of the waters of the South Atlantic. Fourteen oceanographic and sounding profiles, the latter being obtained with two early types of echo sounder, were made across the Atlantic between 20°N and 55°S. This was the first great oceanographic voyage to make a systematic investigation of an entire ocean.

BÖHNECKE continued working onboard *Meteor* during a number of further oceanographic voyages undertaken between 1929 and 1937.

From 1935 to 1945 BÖHNECKE served as Director of the Marineobservatorium at Wilhelmshaven, where he was able to put into practice, at least in part, ideas and plans he had formulated during his years at sea.

During the early months following World War II he was appointed Director of Hydrographic Services, his job being to get hydrography going again in Germany. In this task, he had the assistance of a small number of British hydrographers and technicians, including Commander (now Captain) S.J. HENNESSEY.

Although Günther's first love was oceanography, he had wide experience of hydrography and settled quickly to his task. From the outset it was clear to his staff that he would not spare himself in regathering a nucleus from the scattered

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remnants, around which he built up a new organization which was to become the Deutsches Hydrographisches Institut.



Captain HENNESSEY remembers driving tirelessly through the ruins of Hamburg with him in his ancient Mercedes in search of a suitable building in which to establish the rebirth of the organization, and to rescue instruments and documents wherever these could be found. "I found him at all times quite unflappable" says HENNESSEY, "and an indefatigable worker whose sense of humour would turn what might appear to be a black situation into something merely grey".

His other task was to get the surveying vessels *Gauss*, *Rugen* and *Hooge* back to work, but even in those days he began to dream about a new *Meteor*.

The theoretical and the practical order of the work of the Institute under BÖHNECKE's direction soon became widely recognized, and there is no doubt that

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the high esteem in which oceanographers and hydrographers hold the DHI today owes much to his early work and far-sightedness, and his first fourteen years (1946-60) as President.

Dr BÖHNECKE established new international relations. The Federal Republic of Germany became a Member State of the IHB in 1952, and in 1957 he was unanimously elected President of the VIIth I.H. Conference. In the same year, he became the first Chairman of the GEBCO Committee, and was elected to be the first Secretary of the newly-formed Special Committee on Oceanic Research (SCOR), a position he held for seven years, during which he strived successfully to develop international cooperation in oceanography, particularly at Government level.

Dr G.F. HUMPHREY, who was President of SCOR from 1961 to 1964, knew Günther well in those days, and he wrote in 1966 that "The essence of BÖHNECKE's approach to his work is humility and an understanding of the human nature of the participants in the many long, uncomfortable and often frustrating meetings he is called upon to serve. He speaks rarely at meetings but we are always aware of his presence, particularly of course when his pipe needs a series of vigorous blows against an ash-tray. He works behind the scenes, and I often recall hours spent slowly walking through the streets on the way to and from meetings, or searching for some pleasant but simple eating place. In those moments he would talk about the best way to approach the agenda or about the background of the various scientists gathered for the occasion". Dr HUMPHREY has recently described Günther to me as being a gentleman in the real sense of the word.

BÖHNECKE was able to help bring about the building of a new *Meteor*, a fine, modern oceanographic research ship in which he served as a Cruise Leader during the International Indian Ocean Expedition.

I last met Günther BÖHNECKE during the Second International Congress on the History of Oceanography in Edinburgh in September 1972, only two weeks after taking up my post as President at the IHB. I was going on to Oban for a meeting of SCOR Working Group 41, where I knew that greater participation by scientists in the GEBCO programme was to be discussed.

Günther, the eminent oceanographer, a former noted Hydrographer, and a former Chairman of the GEBCO Committee, was happy, in a long talk, to give me balanced and sound advice, which left me in no doubt that the way ahead for GEBCO then lay with a joint approach by IOC and IHO, which indeed came to fruition the following year.

BÖHNECKE was an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, an Honorary Member of the German Scientific Commission for the Exploration of the Sea, and a co-founder of the Heinz Sternitz Marine Biological Laboratory, Eilat, Israel.

Long after retirement age, Günther BÖHNECKE continued to serve on oceanographic committees such as that of the German Society for the Advancement of Scientific Research. He never lost his interest in the sea and those who

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worked in that environment. With his passing we may have seen the last of the hydrographer-oceanographers, that small but distinguished body of men who have from time to time enhanced our profession over the last hundred years or so.

G.S.R.

*Note.* - I have been assisted in preparing this Obituary by Professor Dr G. ZICKWOLFF, President of the DHI, and Captain S.J. HENNESSEY, O.B.E., Royal Navy (Retd.). I have also used an extract from an article by Dr G.F. HUMPHREY which appeared in *Deutsche Hydrographische Zeitschrift*, Jahrgang 19, 1966, to celebrate Dr BÖHNECKE's 70th Birthday.

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