

IN MEMORIAM

ALFRED SCHILD

The New York Times, Wednesday, May 25, 1977

Alfred Schild of U. of Texas Dead;

Advanced Many Einstein Theories

"Alfred Schild, a University of Texas physicist who pioneered many advances in the interpretation, verification and application of Einstein's theories of relativity, died yesterday in Downers Grove, Ill. He was 55 years old.

Dr. Schild's work opened many areas of theoretical physics that enabled him and others to calculate, for example, the gravitational fields surrounding rotating black holes in the universe.

In 1962, Dr. Schild established the Center for Relativity Theory at the University of Texas at Austin. The center, which Dr. Schild directed until 1972, has been in the forefront of research in relativity theory and its role in understanding such things as the formation of galaxies, alternative theories of gravitation and quantum mechanics."

The above abstract from his New York Times obituary demonstrates the esteem with which our late colleague Alfred Schild is held.

Alfred was born in 1921 in Istanbul, Turkey. In World War II he was studying in England when he was interned because of his German passport and was sent to Canada. There he completed his education, receiving B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Toronto. It was there also where he began work with Leopold Infeld, with whom he maintained a lifelong relationship. In 1946 Alfred joined the faculty of the Carnegie Institute of Technology. He arrived at Texas in 1957 as a professor of mathematics and in 1963 was named Ashbel Smith Professor of Physics. He obtained and maintained his position in the world of science first through his own work, but also through his encouragement of his associates and students at the Center and by bringing to the Center a constant stream of the best people in the world. He himself made frequent visits, serving as visiting professor at universities in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Dublin, Paris, Copenhagen, Warsaw, Wurzburg and Sydney. His co-founding of the Texas Symposia on Relativistic Astrophysics, symposia which are frequently held outside of Texas, and his service on the editorial boards of several scientific journals, including the Journal of Mathematical Physics and the Journal of General Relativity and Gravitation, greatly extended his influence.

It is hard to overestimate Alfred's contributions to physics at the University of Texas. He was one of the prime moving forces not only behind the establishment of the internationally recognized Center for Relativity but also helped in the development of the Centers for Plasma Physics, Particle Theory and Statistical Mechanics. Indeed, Alfred was mainly responsible for bringing to the University its first Nobel laureate, Professor Prigogine.

Alfred not only strove to move the University towards real excellence in recruiting outstanding scholars but he was also a vigorous champion of the freedom of students and faculty to learn, to teach and to perform research. He was well known for his participation in General Faculty debates when he felt that administrative officials unduly hampered freedom of expression. Yet throughout he was known for his courtesy and lack of enmity. No better tribute to his warmth and openness as a person can be found than the fact that even some of those with whom he was in strong opposition remained his friends. Alfred was also politically active in regard to national questions, being in early opposition to the Vietnam war. Outspoken in favor of peace, and against injustice, he had no hesitation in trying to promote what he considered decency and honor in international relations. As a member of the International Committee on General Relativity and Gravitation, his role was a sober one but not particularly conspicuous. He promoted the formation of the International Society formed by this committee in order to give encouragement to international scientific cooperation.

Even in his earliest papers one can see the geometrical viewpoint which characterized Alfred's work. In his discussions of the foundations of relativity, in particular in his treatment of the equivalence principle, appears the well-known "Schild's Ladder." This diagram, more concretely than any formula, portrays the role of particle and light paths in determining the curved geometry of spacetime. Alfred's best known works, on foundations of relativity, on conformal techniques, on quantization, on algebraically special solutions, all demonstrate his physical-geometrical insight. His

expository papers, his lectures on general relativity, the Tensor Calculus book written with J. L. Synge, his more popular papers on time and the twin paradox, the paper on lattice spacetime, all are deservedly popular with students. His last works, on Fokker action principles and string models of particles, also bring a powerful and provocative geometrical viewpoint to physical problems.

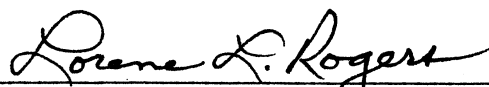
Alfred's goal was to explain nature. The mathematics used, the geometrical intuition developed, were for that purpose, not for purposes of elegance or even consistency. In his review of J. L. Synge's Relativity: The General Theory, Alfred wrote: "To the physicist logical consistency, as such, is no virtue. He is groping along a dark road towards a theory which will explain all of nature ... inconsistency is merely one of many indications that he is still ... far from his destination. A theory which explains a large region of experimental and observational facts, even though it is inconsistent on the blurred boundary of the region, tells him that he is on the right road. It is this road which is the physicist's truth; to him the great sin is to be lured away from it towards bright and beautiful mirages on either side."

Alfred's health had deteriorated these past couple of years. At the time of his death he and his wife Winnie were living in Illinois, where he was Argonne Universities Association Distinguished Appointee for 1976-77. His appointment at Argonne allowed him to rest from teaching duties, and he did look much better this past spring, though he was working harder than ever on research and was looking forward to a lecture tour in early summer. But early in the morning of Tuesday, 24 May, he awoke with an apparent attack of

indigestion. Shortly thereafter he had died, of a massive heart attack.

The loss of a friend is a shock, particularly when it happens with so little warning. Alfred was more than a friend. He was one whose insight into physics, academic life, politics, personal matters, could always be trusted; a guide and leader. We need people like him.

Alfred is survived by his wife, Winnie; a daughter, Mrs. Carol Everett, her husband and two children, of Anchorage, Alaska; a daughter, Kitty, of El Paso; a son, David, of Seattle, Washington; a sister, Mrs. Walter Lewin, of Scarsdale, New York; a sister, Mrs. Eric Forster, Scotch Plains, New Jersey; and his mother, Ms. Fanny Schild, Scarsdale, New York.



Lorene L. Rogers, President of  
The University of Texas at Austin



Bill D. Francis, Secretary  
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors F. A. Matsen (chairman), R. A. Matzner, and L. C. Shepley.