

Obituary - October 4, 2000
Oswald Francis "Mike" Schuette

Mike Schuette, a true renaissance man, died of a stroke at this home on August 6, 2000. He was a noted physicist, history buff, world traveler and German expert. He graduated with a BS in physics from Georgetown University in 1943. He was a naval officer during WWII, developing mine countermeasures at sea aboard minesweepers, becoming an expert on mines, and he served on the National Min Warfare Committee of the remainder of his life. He obtained a Ph.D. from Yale University in 1949 and served as associate professor of physics at the College of William and Mary until 1953, when he was selected to be a Fulbright research professor at the Max Planck Institute in Mainz, Germany, serving also as a Science Liaison Officer for the U.S. Navy Scientific and Technical Unit. Returning to the United States in 1958, he was on the staff of the National Academy of Sciences and subsequently a Deputy Director for Space and Research at the Department of Defense. He left Washington in 1963 to become Chairman of the Department of Physics and Astronomy at the University of South Carolina, a position he held until 1979.

He received the Verdienst Kreuz Erster Klasse, the highest civilian honor of the German government, for his many efforts to link the University of South Carolina with German Universities, particularly the Martin Luther University at Halle, which had economist Francis Lieber as a common bond with the University of South Carolina. He organized and contributed to simposia about Lieber, and also Alexander von Humboldt. He also developed close ties with many South African researchers.

As chair, Mike led the department through its fledgling years as a Ph.D. granting organization. There was no doubt that the department came first in his order of priorities. His experience was invaluable in obtaining grants, and recognition for new faculty members. He hired more than a dozen young faculty members several of whom achieved international recognition.

Mike had a great interest in the political aspects of physics, stemming from his father, one of the earliest (if not the earliest) White House press correspondents. Further, his stint at the American Academy of Sciences put him in touch with many of the most important scientists in the USA. (RDE), can well recall spending time with Mike and his mother in Washington discussing politics, in which I learned more about the private lives of senators and congressional representatives than I believed possible--and certainly more than what was in print. In that one evening I learned how the government operated--not as the textbooks suggest. Mike used this ability to persuade the Vice Chancellor Germany and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hans Dietrich Genscher, to receive an honorary degree from the University of South Carolina.

Ronald D. Edge
 Charles P. Poole
 University of South Carolina