

Letters

Department of Amplification

New York, N.Y.

GENTLEMEN:

If you have a feature roughly the equivalent of *The New Yorker's* Department of Amplification, you might be interested in the following anecdote that amplifies a personal attribute of the late Dr. Theodore von Kármán.

In the June 1963 issue of *Engineering and Science* the excellent article by Prof. W. D. Rannie emphasized Prof. von Kármán's personality as an instructor interested in students. I recall vividly an incident occurring circa spring 1942 that emphasized this trait. I was then taking Professor Ward's course in Complex Variable Function Theory, and was in the library, along with several other members of the class, working on problem assignments. As was common with all graduate course homework problems, this was open book, and any source was legitimate in helping to do the problems.

A particularly tough problem on the Gamma Function had a group of us stumped — this group including some of the bright boys, such as Dave Bohm, Charlie Wilts, and Abe Zarem. We saw Professor von Kármán enter the library, and someone suggested that we ask him how to do the problem. The problem was not from Coplon's text, but was one which Professor Ward had formulated. I was elected to approach Professor von Kármán. This I did with trepidation, but was very pleased to see his face light up when I posed the problem to him. He asked, "Where did you get this one?" and when I told him, a twinkle came into his eye and he said, "Oh, that Ward, he's a foxy one!" He then promptly proceeded to outline the approach to the solution of the problem, in a few deft equations. He insisted that we work it out for ourselves, which we then did.

The next day in class the student who presented the problem on the blackboard received a compliment from Professor Ward, and the student

admitted the source of the hint for solution. "Oh," said Professor Ward, "that von Kármán, he's a foxy one!"

Very truly yours,

VICTOR WOUK, *president*
Electronic Energy Conversion Corp.

More Amplification

Stanford, California

EDITOR:

Just noticed no credit for the von Kármán picture in the June issue of *E&S*. You may not know it was taken by Ben Olender of the *LA Times*, when he and I were both on the Pasadena *Star-News*. Von Kármán always said it was the best portrait ever taken of him. And guess who was holding the slave light that lent the nimbus to that imposing mane of grey hair?

JEFF LITTLEBOY
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