

Letters

EDITOR:

This is a very subjective analysis of an extraordinary event in which I recently participated. My feeling is that an insider's view will interest my fellow alumni.

I decided to become a marshal for the November 15 March on Washington because of my belief that widespread violence during the activities would completely discredit the peace movement in this country. Wanting the United States to leave Vietnam promptly, I hold that continual, peaceful protest will hasten a withdrawal.

On the eve of the parade, I walked to the White House to see the March Against Death, the 40-hour procession of 40,000 people carrying the names of war dead from Arlington National Cemetery to the Capitol. In sharp contrast to this civilian demonstration were the army convoys that patrolled the streets near the President's residence.

The 200 marshals who had volunteered for the "front wedge" met at 8 a.m. on Saturday, just southeast of the Capitol. (Only six-footers were asked to join this group; I cheated by one quarter inch.) The chief marshal of the parade gave us our instructions—to protect the dignitaries and keep the procession moving.

Midmorning found thousands of people already gathered at the parade staging area on the Mall. March leaders distributed huge placards, enabling members of various interest groups to walk together. Banners reading "Trade Unionists," "Nationality Groups," and "New York City" suggested that the organizers had yielded to great American political traditions. Senator Eugene McCarthy (Minn.) then spoke to the throng, and the paraders began moving toward Pennsylvania Avenue. The front wedge led the way.

We eventually reached the grounds of the Washington Monument, where food, drink, and toilets were available. The marshals formed a locked-arm wall three people deep around the stage area as the

site filled with thousands of people. Those who brought food and those who bought food shared it; I remember taking a bite from three different sandwiches and an apple, and taking one swig from a gallon of California wine. Several people bought entire cartons of apples from the concessionaires and proceeded to throw the apples into the crowd. In this wonderful spirit of community the rally began.

Reverend William Sloan Coffin, Dr. Benjamin Spock, Senators Charles Goodell (N.Y.) and George McGovern (S.D.), and Mrs. Coretta King spoke to the multitude, but the feelings of the day swelled forth with the singing of Arlo Guthrie and Pete Seeger. The message to the President was in Seeger's refrain:

*All we are saying is,
Give peace a chance.*

There were angry people at the Mall too. About 1,000 ralliers were militant, and many of them bore North Vietnamese or Vietcong flags and wore crash helmets and gas masks. They shouted at the speakers, were respectful of nobody, and threatened to penetrate the lines of marshals. (They could not though because the crowd was too dense.) What they did achieve was photographic exposure. This thousand in the multitude looked ludicrous in battle dress, and we know that they spoiled an otherwise peaceful day by their confrontation with the police at the Justice Department after the rally was officially over. The police, to be sure, were superb.

One person in the throng was angrier than any of the more obvious militants. He carried a sign which read: "Hitler Too Had A Silent Majority."

Minutes were hours to the marshals who had been outside since early morning and on their feet most of that time (as the police had been). The speeches seemed interminable. As sunset approached, however, four members of the Cleveland Orchestra played a Beethoven string quartet, and finally the cast of the play *Hair* led the crowd in 15 minutes of dancing in place to the joyous strains of "Let the Sun Shine."

The emotions of the day did not subside quickly, but fatigue overwhelmed them. My lasting hope is that the depth of feeling expressed by so many will hasten the end of United States military participation in Vietnam.

Today I received a letter from the fellow Caltech graduate with whom I shared a room during our first week in Pasadena six years ago. A week ago he killed at least three people on trails in Vietnam. He closed his letter not with the usual "Peace," but with "Peace, how hollow it rings after today."

LES FISHBONE '68
College Park, Maryland
November 17, 1969

This letter, received by Hallett Smith, chairman of the division of humanities and social sciences, is a rare enough communication that E&S is printing it for other readers as well—with the permission of the writer (whose name we have withheld).

DEAR DR. SMITH:

You probably don't remember me, but I met you a couple of times while taking some humanities courses leading to my BSEE degree of 1963. And because you were head of the humanities department while I was attending Caltech, this letter is being written to you.

I will start off by saying that this letter is very difficult for me to write because it concerns my behavior at Caltech, of which I am not at all proud. During my time at the school I didn't write many of the papers assigned to me for humanities classes. At that time I made the age-old mistake of rationalizing that this wrong was right because I had to complete a goal—my degree in engineering. I won't say who did my "ghost" writing, but just that it wasn't a fellow student or anyone connected with Caltech. It was a person who saw that I was undergoing a great deal of emotional stress and probably knew that I wouldn't last without some help.

I'm sure that you have encountered more students than you like to remember who have thought the humanities a waste of time in a science-oriented institution. During my time at Caltech I felt the same too. However, these few years since graduation have taught me that an all-science-oriented education is totally lopsided and can only result in an individual insensitive to human responses and interrelationships. A

scientist or engineer is not truly complete without this awareness.

What I am saying is that the humanities deserved just as much devotion to study as my science courses did. Just telling myself that even though I did all the tests in the sciences and humanities honestly (except maybe taking a little longer on some tests than allowed) doesn't justify in my mind that I wasn't guilty of breaking the honor system.

Many reasons could be given, I guess, to say that I had just cause to bend the rules a little for a necessary end. But the end doesn't justify the means, for if I believed otherwise I wouldn't be writing this letter.

A personal evaluation might be that the entering of Caltech and the temporary modification of my beliefs and ethics was a manifestation of Peter's Principle—namely, rising to the level of my incompetency. I entered Caltech from a

junior college (where I was doing very well) and in due course became almost emotionally "poleaxed" from the extreme work load and separation from home. In time this "percussive sublimation" seemed to erode away my feelings of personal achievement and identification brought in from the other school. But I'm sure my story is not unique, particularly in view of the statistic that one out of four fail or drop out before reaching the end of the fourth year.

This letter is not written with the hint to ease the Caltech workload, but to keep it tough. My personality problems at that time are no reason that the school curriculum should be changed. Either you survive or you don't. I look back and see that the experience made me mature very fast, but not without the aforementioned growing pains.

You may think that this letter is very strange to send after so many years out

of school. Possibly so, but it means a great deal to me, for if I didn't believe that the previous mentioned change in my beliefs and ethics was temporary I couldn't write this letter. The fact that I have written it tells me that I still can admit an error in judgment and behavior.

My basic reason for writing is to admit a past wrong against the Caltech honor system. Furthermore, I want to reaffirm the Caltech policy of heavy humanities. For I can look back at my time at Caltech and see that those courses have done much to shape my thinking. I wish that I had taken the humanities more seriously then instead of viewing them as a "necessary evil."

I will finish by saying that if you have ever asked the question, "Am I getting through to those science-oriented students?," take it from me that you did get to this one.

NAME WITHHELD

Books

ALFRED NOBEL,
THE LONELIEST MILLIONAIRE

By Michael Evlanoff and Marjorie Fluor
The Ward Ritchie Press. \$10.00

Reviewed by Dr. Judith Goodstein,
Institute Archivist.

This book about Alfred Nobel and prizes that bear his name adds little to our fund of understanding about science or its impact on society. Authors Evlanoff and Fluor explore briefly Nobel's career as an inventor of explosives, including dynamite and blasting gelatin; there are also chapters dealing with Nobel's family-tree; thumbnail sketches of several prize winners; and Evlanoff's reminiscences of life in the Caucasus, working for Alfred Nobel's nephew, Emmanuel. Scant attention is paid to the development of his scientific thinking, his changing ideas about peace movements and disarmament conferences, or how he came to the idea of setting up annual awards to honor those making the "greatest services to mankind" in the fields of physics,

chemistry, physiology and medicine, literature, and the cause of peace.

DISCOVERY, INVENTION, RESEARCH
THROUGH THE MORPHOLOGICAL APPROACH

By Fritz Zwicky
The Macmillan Company \$6.95

Solutions to our scientific, technical, and social problems can be found in the study of the structural interrelationships that exist among all ideas, objects, concepts, and phenomena, according to this book on the advantages of morphological research and planning. The problems of designing a telescope, an automobile, a power plant, and a possible model of the universe, are among the suggested instances in which integrated engineering, collaboration between the sciences and the humanities, and an evaluation of available human resources might yield the most objective and efficient methods of problem-solving. Zwicky, professor of astrophysics emeritus at Caltech, hopes, in time, to subject all types of problems to such analyses "in order to find the most reliable ways to successfully plan and construct a unified and organically sound world."

A HISTORY OF EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA
TO THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By Basil Davidson
Anchor Books. \$1.95

Beginning with the early African Stone Age this history follows the growth and expansion of the indigenous East and Central African civilizations through periods of migration, settlement, European colonization, and the final emergence at the close of the last century of some modern nation-states. Basing his writing on the most recent archaeological findings and an extensive background knowledge, the author presents a fresh approach to understanding the current political, economic, and cultural circumstances of the central and eastern regions through a cohesive and penetrating examination of the African past.

Basil Davidson, visiting lecturer in African studies at Caltech, gave the November 24 Beckman Lecture, "The African Heritage of the American Black Man." Among his other books on related subjects are: *The African Genius: An Introduction to African Cultural History*, and *A History of West Africa*.