

Robert Eric Bechhofer

March 11, 1919 — May 13, 1996

Professor Emeritus Robert Bechhofer died in Ithaca, after a six-year struggle with Parkinson's disease. He is survived by his wife of 43 years, Joan Lebrecht Bechhofer; son David; daughters Robin, Laurie, and Ellen Kitchen; as well as three grandchildren, a sister, two sons-in-law, a nephew, nieces, and cousins.

Robert Bechhofer was born in New York City, and his family moved to Teaneck, New Jersey when he was a young child. He was educated in the Teaneck public schools. He entered Columbia College in 1937, and graduated in 1941 with the degree of A.B., majoring in mathematics and statistics. From 1941-45, he was Assistant Chief of the Analytical Section, Arms and Ammunition Division, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. In 1945 and early 1946, he was a Technical Engineer with Carbide and Carbon Chemical Corporation, Oak Ridge, Tennessee. In June 1946, he started graduate study in statistics at a summer session at North Carolina State College in Raleigh. He continued his graduate studies at Columbia University. After receiving the Ph.D. degree in mathematical statistics from Columbia in 1951, he was appointed Assistant Professor in Columbia's Department of Industrial Engineering. In 1952-53, he was at Cornell as a Research Associate in the Department of Mathematics and Visiting Associate Professor in the Department of Plant Breeding. From 1953-57, he was Associate Professor in Cornell's Department of Industrial Engineering; from 1957-67, Professor in the Department; from 1967-75, Chairman of the Department; and from 1975-77, Director of the newly-created School of Operations Research and Industrial Engineering. He became Professor Emeritus in June 1989.

During leaves from Cornell, Professor Bechhofer was Visiting Professor in the Stanford Medical School and Research Associate in Stanford's Department of Statistics (1958-59); Visiting Professor, Statistical Laboratory, University of Cambridge (1966-67); and Visiting Professor, Department of Management Science and Department of Mathematics, Imperial College of Science and Technology, London (1973-74).

Professor Bechhofer's research was in statistical theory and led to fundamental advances. Much of it was in a branch of the theory known as ranking and selection procedures, in which the goal is not merely to estimate the values of parameters, but also to rank them with the goal of selecting entities with the most desirable values of the parameters. He was one of the originators of this branch of research, and his contributions to it brought him many professional honors, including election to the International Statistical Institute and as Fellow of the American Statistical Association, the Institute of Mathematical Statistics, the Royal Statistical Society, the

American Association for the Advancement of Science, and other professional organizations, and selection as the first recipient of the Samuel S. Wilks Award for contributions to statistical methodologies in Army research, development, and testing.

Professor Bechhofer was an excellent teacher and lecturer, and gave many invited talks at meetings of professional societies, and several short courses outside of Cornell. Several students who took his courses were attracted into doing research in ranking and selection, and became collaborators on papers published jointly with him. Since his death, the School has received a very large number of letters from alumni, praising Professor Bechhofer as an outstanding teacher and an inspiring mentor.

Robert Bechhofer was a man of wide interests. As an undergraduate at Columbia, he was a member of the chess team, which was a powerhouse at the time. He was a connoisseur of classical music, with a particular liking for the compositions of Berlioz. He was widely read in literature in general, and an avid reader of the *New York Times* and other publications that kept him up with current events. He collected stamps. He and Mrs. Bechhofer collected prints, and Inuit carvings. In 1992, they donated a large collection of prints to the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art.

Two volumes of essays in honor of Professor Bechhofer were published in 1984 and 1985. On May 18, 1992, the Ph.D. computer laboratory and library of the School of Operations Research and Industrial Engineering was named in his honor as the Robert E. Bechhofer Graduate Resource Facility. This was made possible by the generosity of a group of alumni of the School. On this occasion, several friends, colleagues, and students of Professor Bechhofer shared their memories of his life and work.

Robert Bechhofer was an exceptionally generous and sweet-tempered man. Nobody can remember an occasion when he lost his temper. Even during his final illness, when walking became very difficult, he would walk several blocks to his office and exhibit the same cheerful and pleasant outlook. He worked almost to the end on his final publication, a Wiley volume written jointly with David M. Goldsman and Thomas J. Santner, extending the theory to which he had devoted his professional life.

David M. Goldsman, Bruce W. Turnbull, Lionel I. Weiss