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George Shortley,

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LETTER FROM THE ACTING EDITOR

GEORGE SHORTLEY

Operations Research Office, The Johns Hopkins University, Chevy Chase, Maryland
(Received June 23, 1953)

THORNTON PAGE having joined the ORO Field Team in Japan and Korea directly after the May meeting of the Society, it fell to my lot to put together this issue of JORSA. David Katcher, the Associate Editor, went along with Thornton, so the continuity of the editorial office was completely broken. Incidentally, Katcher took this opportunity to resign from his position as Associate Editor, stating that his regular ORO responsibilities were too heavy to permit him to give adequate attention to the JOURNAL. I feel that the Society should be grateful that Dave Katcher, with his extensive editorial experience, particularly on *Physics Today*, did devote much time to JORSA during its first 9-month period of gestation. In the editing and production of this issue I have been ably assisted by Charles Chadsey as Production Manager, Merton Henry as Copy Editor, Ridgely Sappington as Artist, and Pauline Matthews as Secretary. It is noted that the time of all these individuals was furnished as a service to the Society at the expense of The Johns Hopkins University.

The current August issue might be called the 'light-summer-reading' issue of JORSA. This designation is no reflection on the value or importance of the articles, but rather on the relatively non-mathematical content of most of the papers. Many of the papers should be of interest to the executive sponsoring operations research, as well as to the professional worker in the field. This issue should help balance the content of the volume, since it seems clear that JORSA can best serve the interests of the Society by assisting in the dissemination of knowledge *about* operations research as well as by reporting the latest in operations-research methodology.

One whole day of the May meeting of the Society in Cleveland was devoted to a Symposium on "What is Operations Research?" (of which one paper, by Bailey, is in this issue). The general impression of the auditors seemed to be that while they began the day with some notion of the answer to this question, they ended hopelessly confused. Morse's presidential address (first paper in this issue) proposes an *operational* definition that is certainly valid, if somewhat facetious. Hitchman, in the following letter, has some pointed comments on this subject. The writer feels that the best definition is contained in the name. Operations research is *research on operations*. The American term would seem to be preferable to the British, in that the American term implies this definition, whereas the term *operational research* does not.

The distinguished Sir Charles Goodeve, in his paper in this issue, calls operations research a *branch of science*; Hitchman denies emphatically that it is a branch of science. Arguments on this point would seem to the writer to be fruitless, since the meaning of the term science is itself the subject of the argument. Opsearch is certainly not a science in the restricted sense to which we physical scientists

would like to limit the term; but it certainly is a science in the larger sense of 'a department of systematized knowledge.'

Currently, JORSA is running about 75 pages quarterly. The Society has allocated funds sufficient to publish a larger journal. But the number of good voluntarily contributed papers is still very small. For the first four issues, the editors have had to do a formidable amount of 'recruiting' of papers. It is hoped that these growing-pains of a new venture can soon be relieved by having an adequate flow of contributed papers, received in time for competent refereeing and make-up of much of the content of the issues well before the printer's deadline. Your acting editor took over on May 15th with *no* papers ready to be accepted for publication in the August issue, and printer's deadline of June 9th for copy.

Incidentally, Volume 1 of JORSA will have *five* numbers, so that Volume 2 will commence in the new calendar year with the first issue in February 1954. In the current issue we initiate a "Letters to the Editor" section. Letters must be brief since, to permit prompt publication, it has been decided to adopt the somewhat expensive course of sending to the printer with the galley proof those letters not received in time to go with the MSS. Aside from this requirement for brevity, we shall not try to prognosticate on the character of the Letters section. This will depend on the wishes of the membership as interpreted by the Editor. Final deadlines for Letters, as well as for Announcements, will be the first of January, April, July, and October, for the issues appearing in February, May, August and November respectively.

WHAT IS THE MISSION OF OPERATIONS RESEARCH?

NORMAN HITCHMAN

Operations Research Office, The Johns Hopkins University, Chevy Chase, Maryland

(Received April 24, 1953)

A RECENT article* in the Operational Research Quarterly entitled "An Indian View" is cause for deliberation on some important and timely aspects of the subject of operations research. This article expresses the thesis that research is carried out at three *levels*, known as 'fundamental,' 'applied,' and 'operational'; it defines 'operational' research as "that level of research where different uses of a scientific discovery or an invention, its efficiency and degree of utilisation are quantitatively evaluated and the conclusions made to serve as a working basis for socio-technical decisions."

To focus on the real truths of our common mission, we must dispense with the frills and attempt to see how operations research fits into the general scheme of science today. In this respect, the article presented by our Indian colleagues has merit and possibly approaches the truth by contending that operations research is a *level of research* and *not a branch of science*. The arguments which they advance to support this view are compelling and should be noted by the workers on this continent.

On the point that operations research is merely a different level of research, and is, in effect, a third research system following pure and applied research,

* A. Rahman and S. Husain Zaheer, *Opnl. Res. Quart.* **3**, 57 (1952).

