

Good new use for bad old guns

Cheaper high-altitude probes and satellites can be had with the converted 16-inch naval gun that you see in the photo. It is used in Barbados by the



Space Research Institute recently moved from McGill University to Norwich University. The gun is an efficient substitute for the usual inefficient first-stage rocket.

How about decimal time?

We ought to measure time in decimal units, says Edward A. Rossit of Seattle. He proposes that we stick to the day as the most rational of our present units and divide it into tenths, each to be called a *stand*. A tenth of a stand would be a *tempo*; a tenth of a tempo a *dessit*; a tenth of a *dessit* a *moment* and a tenth of a moment a *blink*. In case you decide to convert, notice that a stand is 2.4 hours, a tempo is 14.4 minutes and a blink is 0.864 seconds.

We would have some inconveniences: If time zones differed by a tempo, we would have to work with 16 time zones across the US, and switching to daylight-saving time might be a problem.

Clocks would be quickly converted, says Rossit, and children would learn to tell time faster. Then you could number tempos through the day and avoid the inconveniences of a.m. and p.m. With that part I am totally in

sympathy. The Europeans print their timetables on a 24-hour system, and I think Americans would gain considerable advantage by talking about the train at 19:00 instead of the seven-o'clock. It really annoys me to get ready to go at seven and then find that the train left 12 hours ago.

Does anybody here know d'Abro?

One of the best read and least known of physicists must be A. d'Abro. He wrote *The Evolution of Scientific Thought from Newton to Einstein* (Boni and Liveright, New York, 1927) and *The Decline of Mechanism (in Modern Physics)* (Van Nostrand, New York, 1939). The first book became a Dover reprint under its original title in 1950. The second became *The Rise of the New Physics; its Mathematical and Physical Theories* when Dover republished it as a second revised edition in 1952. These facts are almost all I know.

For the past six months I have been trying to find d'Abro and to find out about him. Despite coöperation from such persons as Norman Adams, Louis de Broglie, Bruce Lindsay, George Owen, Thornton Page and Henry Primakoff, I have learned almost nothing.

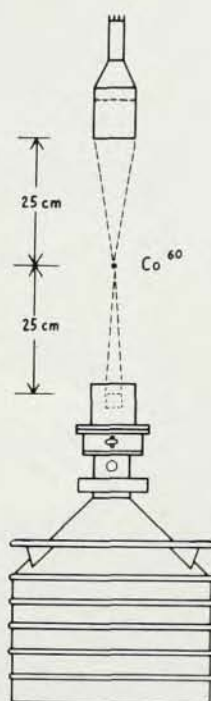
Beyond the book titles the only facts that have, so far at least, stood up against the abrasion of time are in a paragraph from William Minrath, formerly head of the reference department at Van Nostrand:

"I have been checking some old personal records, but I am sorry to say that I have nothing about d'Abro since the period of some twenty years ago. At that time d'Abro was living in Paris, where he had been for years, writing and attending lectures at the Sorbonne. He is, or was, a wealthy man and a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, whatever that is. He could not get his book published; so he paid us the costs of it himself. I recall that Professor Floyd K. Richtmyer of Cornell phoned me to ask about d'Abro and could not believe that he had no degree or professional affiliation."

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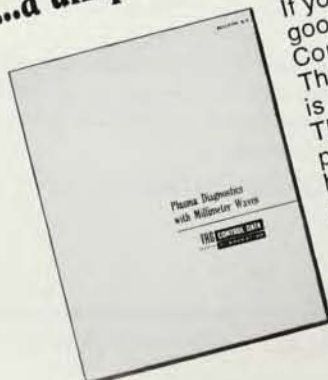
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or not, apparently it has had its share of readers. Yet the author, for all I can find out, has remained practically unknown through several editions of several books. Can anybody tell me about d'Abro—whoever he is?

Acoustics at Hastings

The boss was out the other day so I decided to look through some of the journals he's always reading to see what the excitement was about. I tried the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, which seemed to be all rather businesslike—until I got to the letters section.

There I found that Richard V. Waterhouse at American University in Washington had caught the editors in a typographical error (the kind of thing that causes gnashing of teeth around here). Apparently JASA had listed Martin Greenspan of the National Bureau of Standards as the ASA president in 1067. Waterhouse wrote:

"Research has now established that the Battle of Hastings made such an infernal noise, what with the whine of arrows, clanging of shields, knocking of knees, and assorted moaning and cursing, that when it was all over the enraged citizenry hauled M. Greenspan out of the convenient cave where he had had the forethought to hide (ostensibly to do experiments connected with the time of flight of pulses between England and France), and impelled him to found and head up an Acoustical Society, for the study and elimination of all offensive noise.

"He became the first president the next year, 1067, and chose as his Executive Secretary Wallace Waterhouse, an esteemed kinsman of mine . . . Suffice it to say that our esteemed Fellow and friend Martin Methuselah Greenspan, Society President 1067–1996, obviously has many years to go before reaching the 969 years that should, at the minimum, be his due . . ."

* * *

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