Edgerton: ‘strobe alley’ pilot

By Buddy Miller

Allstonians, a majority of students at MIT have probably seen the impressive display of strobe massages known to as “strobe ally” (the fourth floor of building 5), the faint highways of the mind behind it all, Dr. Harold Edgerton, are less commonly known but are even more interesting

Dr. Edgerton, known to most as “Doc,” received his BS degree from the University of Nebraska in 1925 and his MS and ScD in electrical engineering in 1927 and 1931 here at MIT. He has taught here since that time and is presently Institute Professor Emeritus.

In 1931 Dr. Edgerton perfected the first modern stroboscope, the idea for which sprang from his need for some way to photograph the oscillations of synchronous machines. It served his purpose quite well, and someone suggested to him that his purpose quite well, and the idea for which sprang from the first modern stroboscope, is presently Institute Professor Emeritus.

The impressive display of stroboscopic smoke from the stroboscope is presently the fourth floor of building 5, the “strobe ally.”

In the years immediately following World War II, he designed a camera for the Atomic Energy Commission to photograph nuclear explosions after it was found that the blinding light rendered all conventional cameras useless. He solved this problem of light intensity with a special shutter called the “Rapetron,” which allows light to pass through for as short a time as one microsecond.

With Edgerton’s special shutter, pictures of nuclear blasts can be taken ten miles from the site.

In the early 1950’s Edgerton set up his camera on Eniwetok Atoll in the Pacific and, despite dust, rain, wind, and salt spray, successfully photographed light hours at the moment of detonation.

At the request of the Atomic Energy Commission Edgerton and two of his former students, Kenneth Gremmehausen and Herbert Griess, founded in 1947, the firm EG&G, which has been mislabeled as one microsecond.

In 1953 Edgerton began underwater research under the sponsorship of the National Geographic Society. He designed an electronic flash camera capable of operating in the deepest parts of the ocean, where pressures are as great as 8 tons per square inch.

He has been on numerous expeditions with the French undersea explorer Jacques Cousteau. In one of his expeditions he attached it to a “pinger,” a device which uses声速 to measure distances from the ocean floor. Noting that these sound waves often penetrated the ocean floor, Edgerton devised a way to use sonar to search for irregularities beneath the ocean floor. In this study he said, “All over the oceans, all over the earth there’s a layer that acoustically reflects a signal from about 1000 feet down in the daytime, and at night this layer migrates to the surface. From a sonar standpoint all you know is that you get an echo, but it moves during the day and night, so you know it’s something alive . . . People are still working on it.”

Edgerton recently returned from a trip to the Gulf of Aquaba where he used sonar to search for lost ships that were never found. On several other occasions he has been to the coast of Israel to search for the harbor mentioned in the Bible across and is raised about a similarity about 25 feet under the surface.

Dr. Edgerton and his associates adapted the strobeoscope for use in night aerial reconnaissance photography, as great as 8 tons per square inch.

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