



Canadian Operational Research Society
Société Canadienne de Recherche Opérationnelle

A Short Biography of Omond Solandt
By Robert Ashe

Dr. Omond Solandt was a national leader in spirit and deed whose low-key approach seldom garnered him his deserved acclaim. Dr. Solandt, who passed away in 1993 of cancer, was the founder and first chairman of the Defence Research Board (DRB). At various times in his life he headed the Science Council of Canada, was a vice-chairman of Canadian National Railways (CNR), and Chancellor of the University of Toronto. It is his legacy with the DRB, however, which remains especially significant. He said years later that the DRB was Canada's most effective government agency in stimulating industrial research. A Winnipeg native, Dr. Solandt studied to be a physician and heart specialist. During World War II he investigated the results of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for the UK. Shortly thereafter, in 1946, he organized a defence research organization for Canada. He left the DRB in 1956 to become vice-president of research and development for the CNR. He also worked for Havilland Aircraft and Hawker Siddeley Canada Ltd. and chaired the Science Council of Canada. Dr. Solandt was a visionary - he was among the first scientists to theorize that the ozone layer was thinning - and a dogged advocate of increased funding for R & D in Canada. Archie Pennie, who as Secretary of the DRB in 1953-54 worked in an adjoining office, recalls that Dr. Solandt was a quiet man, not given to trivial or ostentatious behaviour. "I never saw him flare up; he was always at a constant level." Nevertheless, Dr. Solandt was exacting, says Mr. Pennie, who eventually became DRB Deputy Chairman. "When he asked you for something, you'd better have made sure that it was right. He was an astute scientist, and very good at interviewing people. And he stood his ground -- even in the military. But when he'd go out in the field, he was always a pleasant visitor. He always had something important to add." Mr. Pennie remembers that Dr. Solandt appeared to have little time for hobbies, frequently travelling and working long hours. "I don't know if he even owned a TV set."