

Robert C. Guthrie: His Research Helped Win World War II

Robert C. Guthrie was part of a large family growing up in Reed Point. He graduated as valedictorian of the class of 1924 at Sweet Grass County High School in Big Timber, where he won a gold medal for a physics project in a statewide contest. From there, Guthrie headed west to the University of Montana in Missoula, working his way through by mopping floors during the school year and spending summers as a fire spotter in mountain lookouts. He graduated Magna Cum Laude in 1929, with a double major in Mathematics and Physics.

Guthrie left Montana for Washington, DC and a job with the Naval Research Laboratory. In 1930, researchers there had detected the reflection of radio signals, and went to work on developing this technology. Guthrie joined the development team in 1935. As wartime escalated the desperate need for early detection of ships and aircraft, research ramped up in all involved countries. Breakthroughs were made almost simultaneously in Britain and Germany, but both had weaknesses. Britain's radar had limited range, and Germany's used less powerful low-frequency waves. Guthrie's team improved the technology by utilizing microwaves. The first shipboard radar was in place by 1937, and by 1939, Army radar could detect an approaching bomber from 100 miles away.

Guthrie was named head of the Search Radar branch in the Naval Research Laboratory in 1942, and remained in that position through 1954. He then became the first superintendent of the Radar Division, and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1964. President Harry S. Truman presented him with a certificate of merit for his work with radar technology in 1946.

Guthrie and his wife retired to Arizona, but made annual trips home to Montana. After her death in 1988, Guthrie moved to Laurel, where he lived until his own death in 1999.

Sources:

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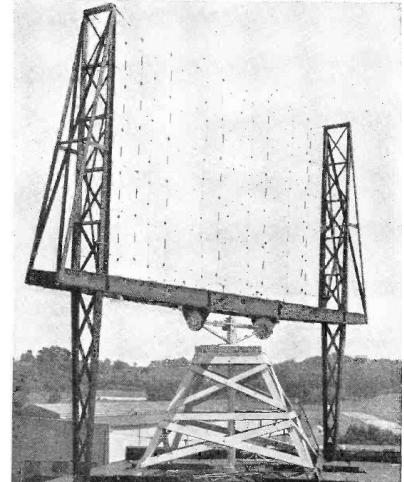
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Early Radar antenna