

Donald F. Trombino, 1940-1998

Amateur solar studies of a high standard lost one of their leading exponents on 1998 July 21 with the death in Florida of Don Trombino just short of his fifty-eighth birthday. Operating from his Davis Memorial Solar Observatory located at home in Deltona, he monitored solar activity in white light, H-alpha and Calcium II-K lines and at his death was well on the way to establishing the Davis SolarNet Project in co-operation with Stetson University at DeLand, Florida, which would have been the only solar monitoring station on the east coast of the United States, providing data and images to the world wide web and for archival retrieval. Throughout the previous decades his high quality images had been featured in numerous articles and books and he himself had written well over fifty articles and contributed chapters on the Sun to at least ten books. Last year he undertook to write what would have been a major contribution to amateur studies of the Sun, but alas it was not to be. So, too, with his plan to lead an American group to next August's meeting organised by SONNE at Garching near Munich (the headquarters of ESO) devoted to 'Research Amateur Astronomy in the

VLT Era', which has now been dedicated to his memory.

Don's interest in astronomy was life long. At the tender age of fifteen, he ground and polished the optics of a six inch f/8 Newtonian for which he was awarded First Place at the New Jersey Science Fair of 1955. It was the first recorded activity in a busy and creative life of high merit. He worked until the mid-1980s in the northeastern US where after time in the media (including a Dick Van Dyke show) he moved into various managerial posts in industry before illness forced a fortunately very active semi-retirement to Florida, where he was able to devote himself almost full time to solar studies. His health limited his travel but the earlier years had seen him participating in or leading thirteen solar eclipse expeditions and lecturing on cruises with the likes of Neil Armstrong and Isaac Asimov. Perhaps one of the greatest highlights of his life (amongst many awards and honours) was the award of Honorary Membership of the All-Union Astronomical & Geodetic Society of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow - and his involvement in 1977 with Soviet scientists in an expedition to Tunguska in Siberia, the location of the famous 1908 cataclysmic event.

But an account of a life of rich achievement cannot do justice to Don Trombino, as anybody who knew him personally will testify. He was a warm and generous friend, a man of wide learning, a born raconteur (even if you did not believe half of the stories) and mimic, a talented cook (which made staying with him a double pleasure) - above all a man with a marvellous, warm and self-deprecating sense of humour. It was typical that a few days before he died, when I rang him in hospital where he had been undergoing a number of distressing surgical procedures, he told me that he had suggested to his surgeon that some of the difficulties might be overcome if a zip-fastener were to be inserted. In all senses, we have lost a very sunny member of the BAA.

H. J. P. Arnold

