Ernst Wilfred Puttkammer (1891-1978)

Ernst Wilfred Puttkammer died March 2, 1978, aboard ship in the Indian Ocean, while on vacation with his wife. He was 87. A memorial service was held in Bond Chapel May 3, at which Walter J. Blum delivered the remarks reprinted below.

Mr. Puttkammer joined the law faculty in 1920 and taught here until his retirement in 1956. His field was criminal law. During the 1940's he was a special investigator for the Chicago Crime Commission and served as director of the Chicago Crime Commission and chairman of the Commission's committee on police, sheriff, and coroner. He was for a time assistant chief of the Illinois State Police.

Mr. Puttkammer did undergraduate work at Princeton and received a J.D. from the University of Chicago in 1917. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and the Order of the Coif, which he later served as national treasurer and president. He served in World War I and stayed on in France after the armistice to study at the University of Clermont.

He became faculty editor of The University of Chicago Law Review at its founding in 1933 and served as faculty advisor from 1936 to 1956.

He is survived by his wife Helen; a daughter, Lorna P. Straus, Associate Professor of Anatomy at the University of Chicago, who also serves as Dean of Students in the College, Associate Dean of the College, and Dean of College Admissions; a son, Charles, in Washington, D.C.; and seven grandchildren. Mrs. Puttkammer's home address is 1221 East 56th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637.

Remarks by Walter J. Blum*

It was in my second year in the University of Chicago Law School, autumn of 1938, that I was enrolled in a course taught by Wilfred Puttkammer. The course, which ran for several quarters, dealt with criminal law and procedure and the problem of crime in our society. Putt, as he was always called, had written and taught in the field of crime for almost two decades. His extra-curricular activities on the Chicago Crime Commission and his services as consultant to the Chicago Police Department and other such organizations were well known. The insiders said that he was one of the front-line observers of our system of criminal justice.

For most of the class, crime was somewhat remote from our personal lives, yet a continuing presence of which we were reminded by the daily newspapers. Though few of us expected to deal with criminal affairs in our work as lawyers, all of us were aware that they constituted a most significant part of the legal system. My own attitude, I suppose, was typical: it was good, but not vital, to know something about the technical rules of criminal law; it was important, however, to come to grips with the problems confronted by society in applying the law of crimes and invoking criminal sanctions. Putt was admirably suited to guide us through and nourish our interest in this area of the law.

The course was a combination of a rigorous exercise in defining various crimes and a wide exposure to the practicalities of the criminal justice process. It succeeded admirably in impressing upon us a unifying approach to the whole of criminal law. He made us explore not only what the law purports to be and do, but

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also how the rules bear upon the attitudes and conduct of those who are affected by them, including the accused, the prosecutors, the defense lawyers, the police, the jurors, the judges, the jailers, and the public at large. The success of the course was in part due to the teacher’s great knowledge of his subject. It was also due to his personality and style.

Putt at all times was completely in control of his class. When he lectured, his thoughts were flawlessly communicated in artfully constructed sentences, each neatly tailored for the context. These sentences invariably were combined into well-organized sequences, so there was no mistaking the structure that he had designed. Listening in class was not unlike hearing a superbly crafted essay being read. There was always a beginning, a middle, and an end, with all the parts fitting together harmoniously.

When Putt asked questions, they were put crisply and succinctly. They almost obliged the student to attempt a response in a similar fashion. Class discussions always seemed headed in a direction that Putt had carefully mapped out in advance. The profile of a discussion could be seen to rest on the minute and logically arranged distinctions that Putt managed to impart to or draw out of his students.

The course also was distinguished by the overall sense of order that was imposed on a large and sprawling subject. Putt was meticulous in adhering to a schedule announced at the very outset. It was generally thought that he could tell in advance of opening day exactly which page in the materials we would reach by the end of each class session. Indeed, this was one of the few courses during my four years as a law student in which every piece of the assigned readings was covered as intended by the instructor.

At all times in class Putt was dignified and yet not distant from his students. In carrying on discussion, he was always patient and gracious—putting students at ease. Even his mannerisms, including some arm motions that may have been derived from watching baseball players in action, were comforting. The concept of old-world courtliness perhaps best captures the ambience that Putt generated in the class-room.

In my senior year I became further acquainted with Putt through contacts arising out of my position as Editor-in-Chief of the Law Review. Putt was then faculty adviser to the Review, as he was for the first 26 volumes, and he continued to take an interest in its development. (In fact, during some of the lean and difficult years for the school in the World War II period, when the staff at one time was only two students, Putt almost alone kept the Review going.) When I was editor, Putt still engaged in the practice of giving the proofs a final inspection—largely, I think, because of the great pride he took in the enterprise. His attention to detail again was evident. There never was a set of proofs on which Putt did not discover printer errors that the rest of us had let go by. The present suite of offices in the Law School that houses the Law Review is most appropriately named in his honor.

All of these early impressions as a student were strengthened when, soon after the close of World War II, I became a member of the Law School faculty and could enjoy having Putt as a colleague. On all occasions he tried to make the faculty environment comfortable for his juniors. In doing so, he often would call upon his sense of humor and marvelous skill as a narrator. Anyone with even the slightest inclination to see the world was bound to be spurred on by his stories of travels on which the Puttkammers had embarked. These accounts were prose at its best, and they enlivened numerous lunches of faculty members at the Quadrangle Club.

In faculty meetings Putt was ever a model discussant. He expressed his own position skillfully but gently. He never raised his voice and he never incited others to do so. Whether he was with the majority or minority, his conduct tended to keep the exchange of views on a high level of civility. In every respect, his standard was that of good decorum.

But what distinguished Putt most as a colleague was his attitude toward the Law School. He was impressed with the background of the institution and understood the sources of its strength. He was both enormously appreciative
of, and dedicated to, the ideals and aspirations of the school. Clearly, he saw himself as carrying on its traditions.

All these qualities of mind and character can be readily detected in reading his most durable work—his book *Administration of Criminal Law*. It is a splendid amalgam of critical analysis, sound policy orientation, humility in the face of difficult problems, and moderation in pressing a point of view and in offering a prescription. The book is pervasively marked by prudence and balance. Its author comes through as the Putt I knew: a very knowledgeable man trying to be helpful in solving important problems in a disciplined and decent manner.