Klaus Wyrtki was born and raised in Germany. He was educated in mathematics, physics, and geography at University of Marburg, and in oceanography, physics, and mathematics at the University of Kiel. He received his Doctor of Natural Sciences degree in 1950, magna cum laude. Klaus then worked in Germany, Indonesia, and Australia before accepting a position as an associate research oceanographer at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in 1961. He moved to UH in 1964 to begin a long and distinguished academic career as professor of oceanography in what was then a relatively small, embryonic department.

His decision to leave Scripps was based primarily on the nature of his position there, the structure of their academic programs, and his own career ambitions. In an article published in the 2002 volume Oceanographic History: The Pacific and Beyond titled, “Reflections on my knowledge in the Indo-Pacific,” Klaus pointed out the strong distinction that existed then at Scrippps between researchers and the “real” faculty -- professors. He was hired as a researcher and, likely, a researcher he would remain. His interests and goals were broader so he moved to Hawaii to get fully immersed in both teaching and research. During his tenure at UH, Klaus would set the departmental standards for excellence in both mission categories. He is, without question, the most influential of all oceanographers ever to have been affiliated with the Department of Oceanography during our 40-year history.

Klaus’ research interests were both fundamental and “trend setting.” He was chairman of the NORPAX science committee (1974-1980) that helped to establish a series of sea level stations throughout the Pacific. In a 11 July 1983 Helen Altonn Honolulu Star-Bulletin article Klaus was described as an “El Niño detective” because of his systematic tracking of this large scale ocean-atmosphere phenomenon. Later, in 1985, the comprehensive Tropical Ocean-Global Atmosphere or TOGA program emerged with Klaus once again in a leadership position. Among many important scientific contributions, Klaus was an active participant in the International Indian Ocean Expedition (1961-1965) and in 1972 he prepared the most comprehensive physical oceanography atlas ever produced for this remote region of the globe; this was also the first “computer made” atlas ever constructed.

Klaus retired from the UH faculty in 1994 but has remained very active in both science as well as more leisurely pursuits. In 1996, the Klaus Wyrtki Center for Climate Research and Prediction was established at UH with NOAA funds to carry on the work Klaus had initiated during his distinguished career at UH. The focus of the center is the El Niño/Southern
Oscillation phenomenon. In February 1999, on the occasion of his 75th birthday, Hans von Storch, Jürgen Sündermann, and Lorenz Magaard conducted an extensive 4-hr interview with then emeritus Professor Klaus Wyrtki covering a range of topics from marine science to contemporary “climate politics.” The taped interview was subsequently transcribed and published by GKSS-Forschungszentrum Geesthacht GmbH as a GKSS report. In 2003, the Department of Oceanography established the “Klaus Wyrtki Excellence in Graduate Teaching” award in his honor.

Klaus is an elected fellow of both the American Meteorological Society (AMS) and the American Geophysical Union (AGU), and is the recipient of many other honors and awards including the Rosenstiel Award in Oceanographic Sciences (1981), AGU’s Maurice Ewing Medal (1989), AMS’s Sverdrup Gold Medal (1991), and the prestigious Albert Defant Medal (1992). In recognition of his pioneering research, the *Shaman II* – a 57-foot longline fishing vessel that was donated to UH by Charles Wells – was recently renamed the R/V *Klaus Wyrtki* (see section 13.10).

In April 2003 it was announced that Klaus would receive the prestigious Prince Albert I medal for his fundamental contributions to physical oceanography. The Prince Albert I medal was established by the International Association for Physical Sciences of the Oceans (IAPSO) and Prince Rainier of Monaco to honor the pioneering contributions of the late Prince Albert I of Monaco (1848-1922). The first medal was awarded to Walter Munk, a world-class physical oceanographer at Scripps in 2001; Klaus was the second recipient. Then in January 2004 it was announced that Klaus would receive the National Academy of Sciences’ Alexander Agassiz Medal for “fundamental contributions to the understanding of the oceanic general circulation of abyssal and thermocline waters and for providing the intellectual underpinning for our understanding of ENSO.” This prestigious award dates back to 1913 when it was established by a gift from Sir John Murray to the Academy.

In 1993, Charles Wells brought his 57-foot longline fishing vessel *Shaman II* from Alaska to Hawaii to try his luck fishing in tropical waters. He worked the vessel until he retired in 2001, at which time he donated the *Shaman II* to UH-SOEST for use in their marine research programs. Later that year the *Shaman II* was reconfigured for its new mission and renamed the R/V *Klaus Wyrtki* in honor of the leading oceanographer in the 40-year history of the UH oceanography program (see Box 4.7 and Figure 13.25). The vessel is intended to be used exclusively for coastal marine research, equipment testing, and for a variety of marine education programs. In this regard, the mission profile is very likely to replicate the R/V *Noi‘i* that was in service from 1976-1981 (see section 13.6).

**Figure 13.25:** The R/V *Klaus Wyrtki* and portraits of its namesake shown in upper left (in center with eyeglasses) working at sea as a young scientist, and in upper right as a distinguished senior scientist at UH circa 1995. (portraits from SOEST archives; vessel photos by D. Karl; collage design by N. Hulbirt)