

David O. Hamrick, President of CLO 1947-1948

[Note: Mr. Hamrick provided this personal reminiscence at the request of Frank A. Shepherd. Mr. Hamrick was President of CLO in 1947-1948.]

My name is David O. Hamrick, and I am a sixth generation native Floridian. I was born, raised, and educated in Okeechobee. I was born in 1924, which was a good year if you were interested in fighting two wars before you were 30 years of age.

Both of my parents had been schoolteachers in early life, my father to raise money to attend law school, and my mother until she was ready to start raising a family. My dad graduated from UF Law School in 1917, married and moved to Okeechobee before it even became a county. My mother was a graduate (1911) of Florida Normal School for Women (which became FSCW and later Florida State University) in Education.

In high school I hated study hall, so I took seven classes a day instead of the required four. As a result had credits enough to graduate at 15. This was in 1939 and at the height of the depression in Florida. My folks thought I was too young to start college and have the responsibility of working my way through at the same time. I continued high school and graduated in 1941 with 20.5 credits instead of the required 16. I took all of the math and science courses that they offered in high school.

As you will recall, the war came along in 1941 and I enlisted as soon as I turned 17. I applied for training in the Naval Air Corps and did fine on all of the requirements up until the time I went in for the visual examination for my physical. The doctor looked at the results, laughed, and said "Son if you got over 100 feet up in the air you would not be able to see the ground". It was the first time I had ever heard the term "astigmatism" or "myopia" but I had a whole lot of both. Even if I could not fly, I decided that I had rather sail than walk, so I enlisted as an apprentice seaman in the USNR at 17. I was still not old enough to register for the draft.

I went to basic training in 1942 and while there I took a competitive examination for an appointment from the fleet to the Navy V-12 program (a college training program for future naval officers). I evidently did quite well for I was accepted into the program, and given orders to report to the cadet training facility at Raleigh, N.C. The big disappointment to me was that, because of my IQ, test scores, and aptitude test results, they were sending me to medical school. I calculated that it was going to require two years of pre-med, three years of med school (with the war-time cram style) and one year of internship before I was ready for active duty. I did not think the war would last six years, and I would have missed it all! As a result, I declined the appointment and asked to be sent, instead, to the much shorter training as a member of the Hospital Corps. I was sent to that training and finished in the top 10% of the class, which automatically placed me in line for advanced specialty training and I went to x-ray school at the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Va.

I have never regretted, for even one minute, the decision to fight the war instead of spending all those years in the safety of a college classroom. I did receive further training for senior petty officers to become qualified for "medical duty in the absence of a Commissioned Medical Officer (MD)".

I went to sea in a light cruiser with the North Atlantic fleet, doing convoy duty between Greenland and Russia for the rest of the war, except for a short interval in 1944 in which we fired support for the landing of the English and Canadian troops in the invasion landing on D-day in June 1944 at Juno Beach in France.

At the end of the war in Europe my cruiser spent several weeks accepting the surrender of German submarines in the North Atlantic, and then joined with a gigantic fleet being assembled for the

invasion of Japan. Our task force was about 200 miles off the entrance to the Panama Canal when the bomb was dropped on Japan in August 1945, which ended the war. We were turned around and did not proceed on to the Pacific.

At the end of the war all of the crew of my ship had more than adequate combat points for immediate discharge but the Navy had very conservative attitudes about releasing the entire crew of a ship all at one time. I was a volunteer enlisted reservist and not a draftee, so I was declared essential and was about six months delayed in being released to inactive duty. I finally got home in March 1946.

While at sea I had taken quite a few college courses through the Armed Forces Extension Service and I received college credit for quite a few hours on my admissions exams to the University. Consequently, I started to the University of Florida as a second-semester sophomore in the fall of 1946.

I truthfully cannot recall (it has now been more than 60 years) how I first heard of the CLO, or who may have been connected with me being admitted to membership. I was merely an ex-GI looking for a place to live and get along with his life.

When I arrived in Gainesville in the fall of 1946, there were about 80 men in the four houses that comprised CLO. I lived in the "Brown House" on the corner of Washington Street [NW 1 st Avenue and NW 15 th Street]. We were 4 to the room, with every room in the house occupied including the living room and front porch. Our room and board was \$28 per month. That I remember well, for \$28 was hard to come by in those days. Board consisted of toast, peanut butter, and coffee for breakfast. No lunch, but a rather good meal at night. Prior to the fall semester of 1946, the University had about 2,000 students. The fall 1946 registration was slightly over 12,000 -- quite a growth in the period of one semester. Most of the guys in CLO at the time I was there were a lot like me -- ex-GIs with several years of combat experience and world wide travel and men who were still somewhat young in years but old men in life experience. We were not a partying bunch but serious guys who had had their life interrupted--often with great trauma.

In my second week at the University I took one of my roommates over to the Infirmary to get treatment for a head cold and sore throat and while I was there I casually asked the attendant at the desk if they had an x-ray department in the facility. He answered that "Yes, they had equipment in the basement, but, no, they did not have anyone who knew how to operate it. I asked to speak with the Medical Director and after about a 10-minute interview, I was hired on the spot and given the equivalent rank of instructor on staff. I was also granted the ability to register early (in those days you stood in long lines for each class -- no registering by computer) so that I got all my classes from 7:30 am to noon. I reported for work at 1 pm and worked until I had finished with all my patients in the afternoon, and was on emergency call all night and every weekend. The hours were long, but the pay was not bad. I was attending the University on the GI Bill, which paid my tuition and paid for most of my books and equipment and paid \$90 a month for living expenses. To this I was now able to add \$250 per month as the "chief" (and only) x-ray technician on staff. I was able to study at any time I did not have a patient to treat so I developed a rather good work ethic that has served me quite well for the rest of my life.

In addition to the GI Bill and the job at the infirmary, I learned that they had an active Naval Reserve Unit in Gainesville (not connected to the University). Just before being released to inactive duty (as a first class petty officer) I had refused a direct commission as Ensign, offered as an inducement to remain in the service. I decided that maybe the pay for reserve training one night a week and two weeks in the summer might be a good addition to my financial well being. I applied for, and was awarded, a direct commission as an Ensign in the Medical Service Corps, and was made the Officer in Charge of the Medical Department of the U.S. Naval Reserve Unit in Gainesville. I also received the additional benefit of being able to spend my two-week training period in the summer at

the Naval Reserve Armory on full pay while at the same time tending my full time job at the infirmary.

I do not recall the exact dates (it has been more than 60 years) but I was elected President of the CLO (I think it was in the fall of 1947). In all of this I found time to get married in June of 1948, and I do recall that I was President at the time I married. I had to resign when I moved out of the CLO in June of 1948.

I remember quite a lot about my time as President. I recall that one of the first things I did was to buy a large deep freeze unit for the kitchen. On many weekends some of us fellows would go out to one of the farms and buy a steer, kill and butcher it ourselves, cut it up, and freeze it for our own consumption. Quite a few of our members were avid hunters, and we developed an unwritten rule that you always brought the killed game back for the deep freeze. Many of our members were agriculture students and we had very strict rules that those students who had anything to do with horticulture classes always brought home all the produce grown on the experimental plots. Very few of the non-CLO students had any use for the produce produced in the class work so we got it all. Most of our ex-GIs had long experience in scrounging; and, as a result, we never suffered from malnutrition. We did all the work on the buildings ourselves; there was a wealth of experience among our members and someone could be found that was able to do anything that might need doing.

One other thing that stands out in my memory is the time (just after I took office as president) when the Dean of Students, R. C. Beaty, sent me a letter as president of CLO directing me to report to his office with all of the books, ledgers, and financial accounts of the organization. At that time, CLO was a bona fide, standalone, not-for-profit corporation organized under the laws of Florida. It was governed by a board of directors elected by the membership of the organization. It had no connection whatsoever with the University of Florida except that the members of the organization had to be full-time students of the University and working their own way through school. I figured that a misunderstanding of this magnitude probably needed an eye ball to eye ball confrontation instead of a letter or phone call, so I went to see the Dean. I explained to him that I was the President, thus the chief officer of a civil corporation, which was a legal entity in the eyes of the laws of Florida and that the University had no authority, jurisdiction, or business in messing with our organization. The Dean took the opposite position, that we were students of the University, which meant that the University had full jurisdiction over anything that we did. We reached an impasse very quickly and it was quite obvious that we were not going to be in agreement about anything. The Dean told me in no uncertain terms that I would have all of the requested documents on his desk by the next Monday morning or I would face extreme disciplinary measures (i.e. expelled or kicked out of the university).

As luck would have it, at an earlier time in my life I had met a lawyer named J. Tom Watson, who was a friend of my father (who was also an attorney) and was currently serving as the Attorney General of the State of Florida. As such, he was a member of the State Cabinet. I got on the telephone immediately and dropped as many names to as many secretaries as necessary and was successful in getting Mr. Watson on the telephone personally. For a very busy man the Attorney General was very gracious in listening to who I was, what I was, and what my problem was. He asked a very few questions and seemed to grasp the essence of the situation immediately. He told me "Mr. Hamrick, I have appointments next Monday which I cannot change, but I will have one of my top assistants in the Dean's office on Monday when you get there".

When I got to the Dean's office on Monday morning, there was an Assistant Attorney General to meet me. He had been very well briefed, and it was apparent that not only the Assistant AG but Mr. Watson himself had done his homework. When we got into the Dean's office, the only time I opened my mouth was to say "good morning Dean". The Assistant AG took over the meeting

before the Dean could get his mouth open to tell him how important he (as Dean) was and how correct his position was.

The Assistant AG started out with "How dare you take the position you have taken with this man who is the chief officer of a sovereign corporation organized under the laws of Florida? On what authority do you seek to interfere with the operation of a legal corporation over which you have no ownership or responsibility? About all the Dean could do was sputter. Then, after giving the Dean quite a lecture on the subject that corporations in Florida were legal entities and entitled to the full measure of protection by government, he told me to leave while he continued to talk with the Dean. He told me that if I ever experienced any more harassment to just pick up the phone and call him. During my entire stay at CLO, or at the University after leaving CLO, I never heard another peep out of the Dean.

Several years after this episode Mr. J. Tom Watson ran for governor of the state but died while his name of was on the ballot but before the election. I took great pleasure in casting my vote for Mr. Watson for governor even though he had been dead for quite some time before the election.

As I indicated earlier, I resigned as president and left the CLO when I got married in June of 1948. I received my BS in Bacteriology in 1949 and my MS in 1950.

In late 1950 I was activated for active duty with the Navy after the start of the Korean War. On the fifth morning following my recall to active service, I was eating breakfast in Tokyo. I spent a total of three combat tours in Korea. I was the Bacteriologist and Chief Laboratory Officer of Fleet Epidemic Disease Control Unit #1. I spent three tours behind the lines with the guerilla forces treating old world typhus fever. I was with the US Marines at Chosen Reservoir when the Chinese came south to enlarge that war.

After the Korean War I returned to the US and served for a few months in a medical unit with the Marines at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. However, my wife was quite unhappy in the Navy, so I resigned my commission and returned to Florida in July of 1953. I joined a small, start-up citrus processing company as its Chief of Quality Control. That unit eventually became the company now known as Tropicana, the largest citrus juice distributor in the world. I was technical vice president for 25 years and then executive vice president and chief operating officer for 10 years. I retired in 1988.

Dave Hamrick

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