DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
RICHARD H. KRAEMER

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Richard H. Kraemer, professor emeritus, government, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
RICHARD H. KRAEMER

The world and the University lost a remarkable human being with the passing of Richard H. Kraemer on June 11, 2011, at the age of ninety-one. He was memorable for his success in two careers, as United States Air Force officer and as government professor at The University of Texas, as well as for his love of life, and for the number and warmth of the friendships he developed in all of the many facets of his life.

Richard was born in New York City on February 24, 1920. Although his father was a Yankees fan, he somehow managed to acquire a passion for the Brooklyn Dodgers, a loyalty that did not diminish after the team moved to Los Angeles in 1957. His enthusiastic involvement in the fortunes of the Dodgers over many decades and from many miles away was indicative of the myriad other interests and friendships for the rest of his life. Once Richard became emotionally involved with something or somebody, he was committed deeply and irrevocably forever. This warm loyalty was as evident in his relationship with his first wife Tylyne, whom he married in 1946 and who died of cancer in 1968, and with Georgia, whom he married in 1971 and who died, also of cancer, in 2009.

Richard entered what was then the U.S. Army Air Forces in 1942, early in World War II. As a navigator on cargo planes and bombers, he completed almost three full combat tours in North Africa and Europe. His memoir of those experiences, The Secret War in the Balkans, published in 2010, is a gripping, detailed recounting of his alternately boring, terrifying, satisfying, and absurd life during that great conflict. The central focus of the memoir is Richard’s involvement in the “Top Secret” night flights from bases in Italy to supply weapons and equipment to the Balkan guerrillas at drop-and-landing zones in Axis-held territory in Yugoslavia. At the end of the war, Richard remained in uniform, being assigned to a variety of peacetime positions, including that of military policeman in Houston. When the Cold War turned hot in Korea in 1950, he resumed his duties as a bombardier in combat planes in what had become a separate service, the U.S. Air Force. In 1953, he flew forty-one missions of a fifty-mission tour before the armistice was signed in July.

According to his personal journals, Richard flew sixteen hundred hours on missions in combat zones, possibly a record for an American airman. His awards and decorations in both wars included the Distinguished Flying Cross with two oak leaf clusters, the Air Medal with eight oak leaf clusters, the Presidential Unit Citation, and the Air Force Commendation Medal.

In the late 1950s, he was assigned to be head of Air Force ROTC at The University of Texas at Austin. There, he discovered that he had a talent and passion for teaching young people. As a result, when he retired from the Air Force in 1962, he entered upon his second career, enrolling in the graduate program of the government department at the University. After earning his doctorate in 1965, he was hired by that department to teach the large, required introductory courses at the lower-division level and military politics at the upper-division level. He taught full time for the next twenty years, part time until 2001, and then continued to teach through the Distance Education Center until his ninetieth birthday.

Students who expected to find a stereotypical military “lifer” teaching them about that aspect of American politics were astonished and thrilled by Professor Kraemer. Although once active in the Unitarian Church, Richard was not religious, and politically, he was a consistent liberal. He cared deeply about good teaching. He
was innovative in his use of educational techniques, often eschewing formal lectures in favor of involving the students in political games and simulations. Moreover, his talent for telling stories to illustrate scholarly points and his warm persona on stage and in office hours made him a personal favorite of many students. He won the Jean Holloway Award for teaching, one of the few University teaching awards administered entirely by students, as well as a national award from the Arnold Air Society.

Exasperated at the dry, legalistic approach that dominated every textbook on Texas politics that he was forced to assign to his “introductory” students, in the early 1980s, Richard partnered with Charldean Newell, former fellow graduate student and then a professor at North Texas, to write *Texas Politics*. This textbook uniquely featured both realistic analyses of the sausage-making aspects of the state’s politics and an informal, accessible writing style. The book was an instant success and soon became the best-selling treatment of the dirty and colorful world of Texas politics. In 1991, Richard brought in his colleague, David Prindle, as a co-author and soon thereafter retired from the project. The book by then had taken on a life of its own and in 2012, with Newell, Prindle, and James Riddlesperger of Texas Christian University as co-authors, will be published in its twelfth edition.

A recounting of Richard Kraemer’s professional life, however, covers only part of his memorable personality. He had a variety of non-professional interests that he pursued with jovial intensity. In each of these hobbies, his active exuberance drew other people to him, and his huge talent for friendship created circles of companions who cherished his company for decades. He loved fine wine and established local organizations to meet regularly and compare vintages. He was an indefatigable cook, constantly seeking out interesting new recipes from sundry foreign cultures and holding regular dinner parties at his house to sample them. For more than two decades, he and Georgia were the nexus of a Gourmet Club that met monthly. Richard personally selected the vintage champagne that was served at the memorial shortly after his death. It was typical of Richard’s thoughtful concern for his friends that he would arrange to give them this final gift of good taste from beyond the grave.

He was an intensely involved angler, exploring the lakes and streams of central Texas for bass, bream, and the occasional gaspergou with a variety of fishing buddies. When the fish were not biting, he liked to discuss the Dodgers. He read fiction, biography, and history and invited friends to his home to discuss books. And, of course, he provided a constant stream of indignant commentary about politics, arguing civilly with anyone who cared to discuss the latest dismaying antics of state or national politicians.

Although Richard fathered no biological children, he and Tylyne adopted two boys. Then, at sixty-three, when most people are thinking of retirement, Richard and Georgia formally adopted Georgia’s two grandchildren, John and Kelley, for whom they had assumed responsibility from the time the children were very young. Richard and Georgia also assisted in raising eight other children through the Save the Children Foundation.

As with most people who live a long time, Richard’s life was not untouched by disappointment and sorrow. He lost two women he loved to long-term, painful illnesses. The two boys that he and Tylyne adopted both died young, one an apparent suicide, the other in an automobile accident. Yet his friends admired the way he kept his emotional equilibrium through these devastating personal blows, neither denying the pain they caused, nor succumbing to depression and bitterness. Even in his last months, with his body failing, living alone in a small apartment, and having to give away his beloved dogs because he could no longer take care of them, Richard was always cheerful and hospitable to visitors, always ready to debate politics, swap gossip, or discuss the fortunes of the Dodgers.

Richard Kraemer had a zest for life and friendship, and he loved to share it. He made such a vivid, positive impact on so many other people in so many areas of experience that he will be fondly remembered for as long as they themselves live.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors David Prindle (chair), Robert L. Hardgrave, and David V. Edwards.

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