

Donald L. Cromer

Washington State '59

Oxford Cup Roll No. 070

Initiated on February 20, 1955

Gamma Theta Chapter Roll No. 641



Donald L. Cromer of Spokane, Wash. attended Washington State for one year before receiving an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. He graduated from the Naval Academy in 1959, and was immediately commissioned in the Air Force, assigned to Strategic Air Command as a missile combat crew commander. He did not know at the time, but he was embarking on what would become a fifty-year career in air and space that would take him across the country and into a handful of government agencies.

Cromer spent the late 60s and early 70s a little differently than most people his age. While young people across America were focused on rock music and free love, he was at Cape Canaveral testing space crafts for NASA's Gemini Project, or in a lab analyzing satellite data at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. And while some college students across the country were rioting and protesting on their campuses, Cromer was busy in the classroom, earning a master's degree in electrical engineering at the University of Denver, completing the executive program at Stanford Business School, as well as the National Security Management Course at Harvard.

In the late 70s and 80s, Cromer raised to even more prominent leadership positions. He gathered a host of official titles including Director of Advanced Technology, Director of the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program, even Director of Space Systems at the U.S. Air Force

Headquarters in Washington, D.C. In this position, he was responsible for the management of test, launch and on-orbit control activities of Air Force space and ballistic missile systems.

Following his retirement from the Air Force in June, 1991, Gen. Cromer became president of Hughes Space Communications Company and served in that capacity through 1998. He subsequently served as an advisor to Air Force and the Department of Defense for National Security Space Programs, and was Chairman of the Board of The Aerospace Corporation from 2005 to 2008.

It was during these “retirement” years that Don would return occasionally to Spokane to visit family and friends. During one such visit, which also included his addressing ROTC students at the University of Idaho and Washington State, he was advised by an alumnus of the plight of the struggling Gamma Theta Chapter. He volunteered to help and a steering committee was formed around his leadership. He assumed the presidency of the chapter housing corporation and made regular trips from Southern California to Washington State for meetings to help solve chapter problems. Yet again, a busy man still found time for his Fraternity.

All the details of Don Cromer’s half-century career could (and probably should) fill volumes, and this biography is far from comprehensive. But one common thread is shared by all of his experiences: high stress and responsibility coupled with little personal glory. Brother Cromer could tell you there is nothing fabulous about staying up until 5:00 a.m. monitoring the precise location and speed of satellites and ballistic missiles. He always stayed focused on what he could do better and how he could help, not who he could blame or what he could get out of it. It is this approach to work and to life that we celebrate in Beta Theta Pi, and why Donald Cromer is now bestowed with Beta’s highest individual award for professional achievement.

Don and his wife Carole live in Fallbrook, CA. They have four adult children and five grandchildren.