

William John McCoy, Jr.

July 30, 1924 — May 22, 2007

William John McCoy, Jr., better known as John McCoy, was born in Valeda, Kansas to William John McCoy, Sr. and Gretchen Kennedy McCoy. He grew up in Coffeyville, Kansas, which, as he sometimes reminded us, was most famous as the scene of a raid by the James brothers.

John graduated from Field Kinley Memorial High School in 1942 with top academic honors, having been elected Student Congress President. He went on to attend the University of Kansas, but in 1943 was called into the U.S. Army. After basic training, he qualified for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at the University of Chicago, where he entered the accelerated Chinese Program, and then joined the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) that was later to morph into the CIA. He earned his Parachutist's badge and served actively as an OSS member in China working with the Nationalist troops, training them in the opposition to the Japanese invasion. In February 1946, he was honorably discharged as a Sergeant, with a bronze star, along with a good conduct medal, the victory medal, and several theater ribbons.

John resumed his academic life at the University of Chicago, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1948 with a Master of Arts degree in Oriental Languages and Literature. He had intended to earn a Ph.D. degree at Harvard, but he had retained a connection with the military, serving as a Sergeant in the Marine Reserves. Thus, his Harvard experience was cut short by his being recalled to active duty during the Korean War, serving for a time in Washington. Then he had government assignments as a civilian with the Army in Tokyo and transferred to the Treasury Department for five years in the U.S Consulate-General in Hong Kong.

After that service, John entered the Cornell graduate program in linguistics, and was awarded the Ph.D. degree in 1966, with a Chinese historical linguistics dissertation entitled "Szeyap data for a first approximation of Proto-Cantonese." He was hired as a Professor by the then Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, of which he remained a member for 18 years, from 1966-84, conducting teaching and research primarily in Chinese, but also including other languages such as Japanese and Mongolian.

John was one of the founding members of the full-year intensive FALCON Asian language program, which still continues. He served as its first director and directed the intensive Chinese language program from 1972-84. He also played a central role in the organization and activities of Chinoperl (Conference on CHINEse Oral and

PERforming Literature). He was also active for many years in the National Association for Self Instructional Language Programs, participating in workshops and conferences and testing Chinese in numerous institutions around the country. As a member of the Cornell faculty, he traveled extensively in the People's Republic of China with academic, professional and government delegations.

In 1984, John retired from Cornell and entered the business world, to serve for five years as President and General Manager of the Squibb (now Bristol-Myers Squibb) joint venture in China. Retiring from there, he served as Chief Representative for Sterling-Winthrop Drugs International, guiding their negotiations and tracking the progress of their joint venture in Shanghai. Then he served in the same capacity with Hafslund-Nycomed, a Norwegian pharmaceutical firm preparing for a start-up in Shanghai. He was co-president of the newly re-established American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai, and also was consultant for several American companies seeking to initiate joint ventures in China, finally retiring in 1994.

John was a man of earthy good sense, a supportive and collaborative colleague, and a good friend to many. In dealing with any problem or initiating and implementing any project, he always had the general good rather than personal advancement in mind and had a balanced perspective on any issue. He was quiet-spoken but articulate, possessed a wonderful sense of humor and irony, and liked to say absurd things with a straight face. This was one facet of his ability to moderate conflicts and confrontations in a calm and measured way, often with highly pertinent humor.

John was a genial host, and in particular hosted many memorable dinners that were distinguished by the culinary offerings of his wife Stella, a chef of professional quality in several cuisines and the author of several cookbooks on Chinese cooking in which she acknowledged his help and support. He was also a man of many interests, and capabilities, extending to his taking up new ones such as the flamenco guitar. He earned a pilot's license first in gliders and then in powered aircraft.

To those of us that knew him and worked with him, he was a valued and cherished friend and colleague, and his contribution to Cornell lives on particularly in the continued success and appeal of the Chinese language program that he initiated and nourished.

His wife of 40 years, Stella Fessler McCoy; daughters, Molly and Katy McCoy; stepson, Freeman Fessler; and sister, Sue Eichorn, as well as nine grandchildren and a number of nieces, nephews and cousins survive John.

James W. Gair, Chair; Richard Leed, John Wolff