



Jack E. Oliver

September 26, 1923 – January 5, 2011

John Ertle Oliver (Jack), Professor of Geological Sciences, died peacefully in his home at the age of 87 at Kendal of Ithaca on January 5, 2011. Jack was the son of the late Chester Oliver and Marie Ertle Oliver of Massillon, Ohio.

Jack was born on September 26, 1923 in Massillon, Ohio. He played football on Massillon high school's national championship team, coached by the legendary Hall-of-Famer Paul Brown. He attended Columbia University on an athletic scholarship and received his BA and MA in Physics, and his Ph.D. in Geophysics.

In 1943 Jack took a leave from Columbia to serve in the 129th U.S. Naval Construction Battalion (the Seabees) in the South Pacific and returned in 1946 to earn his bachelor's degree in physics in 1947 and his Ph.D. in geophysics in 1953.

Jack was a geophysicist specializing in seismology and tectonics. He loved to learn, discover, and teach. He was a pioneer in the use of seismological observations to study the Earth's crust and in the 1960s together with Bryan Isacks and Lynn Sykes, wrote "Seismology and the New Global Tectonics," a seminal paper on the topic published in the AGU's Journal of Geophysical Research, 15 September 1968. He became Professor of Geology and Chairman of the Department of Geology at Columbia University and also head of the program in earthquake seismology at Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Geological Observatory.

In 1971, Jack came to Cornell University as chairman of the newly reorganized Department of Geological Sciences and shaped it into a top national research institution. During his chairmanship, Jack envisioned a concentration on the problems of continental geology, particularly the deep continental crust, and built a department that emphasized geophysics and the applications of plate tectonics theory. He was the founding Director of the Institute for the Study of the Continents, and together with Sidney Kaufman established the Consortium for Continental Reflection Profiling (COCORP), the first national program for the systematic exploration of the continental crust with modern seismic reflection technology. COCORP

became the stimulus and model for large scale studies of the crust around the world, resulting in a revolutionary new view of the structure and origin of the continents.

Jack was a member of the National Academy of Sciences and is former president of both the Seismological Society of America and the Geological Society of America. In 1958 and 1959 he was a seismological advisor on the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and a delegate to negotiations in Geneva. He received numerous awards and honors during his career including the Kaufmann Gold Medal of the Society of Exploration Geophysicists in 1983, and the Penrose Medal of the Geological Society of America, its highest honor, in 1998. He authored or coauthored over 200 scientific papers and visited over 55 countries during his years of geophysics research. He also wrote several books including *The Incomplete Guide to the Art of Discovery and Shocks and Rocks: Seismology in the Plate Tectonics Revolution*", and *Shakespeare Got It Wrong: It's Not "to Be," It's "to Do": the Autobiographical Memoirs of a Lucky Geophysicist*.

At both Columbia and Cornell Jack served as a mentor and inspiration for generations of students, many of whom have gone on to become international leaders in both industry and universities around the world.

Jack loved hiking and met his wife, Gay van der Hoeven, on a hike outside of New York City while they were both members of the Appalachian Mountain Club. In 1964 they married and in 1971 moved to Ithaca where they raised their 2 daughters, Nell and Amy, and remained for the rest of their lives. As a family they enjoyed many trips around Ithaca and in the Adirondacks canoeing, hiking, camping, and cross country skiing. When he was in his eighties he still hiked the Taughannock Falls loop regularly.

Jack was predeceased by his wife, Gertrude (Gay) Oliver. He is survived by his brother, William Oliver, also of Massillon, Ohio, daughter Cornelia (Nell) Oliver of Pacific Palisades, CA, daughter Amy Mascolo (Richard) of Doylestown, PA, and grandchildren Philippa, Katherine and Georgina Thomas of Pacific Palisades, CA, and Monica, Christina, and Jack Mascolo of Doylestown, PA.

Dean of Faculty Office (Information gathered from Ithaca Journal Obituary and Cornell Chronicle Online)