

Class of 1940 – Walter Arnold Ringger, Jr.



He built his first radio in junior high school, and became a ham radio enthusiast for life. At the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, he was a member of the fraternity, Delta Tau Delta. He met his future wife, Edith at a fraternity party. For part of college, he alternated quarters at the university with those working at the Memphis Firestone plant. During college, he hitchhiked to Fort Wayne, Indiana to take the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) license exam. With his license, he worked at WBIR and then WNOX, where he was responsible for keeping the station on air; at the same time, he also took a full course load of electrical engineering classes. After graduating with a degree in electrical engineering, he married Edith. They moved to Washington DC, after he was inducted into the Navy as a Chief Specialist. He worked in the research division of the Naval Ordinance Lab on radar, and helped develop machines that were precursors to the first computers. After WWII, he and his young family moved back to Memphis. He was a member of Trinity Lutheran Church of downtown Memphis as a child and remained a member throughout his life. On his first job at Memphis Light, Gas, and Water (MLG&W), he envisioned the need for better street lighting. While working at MLG&W, he also drew

architectural plans and taught night classes at the the then local branch of the University of Tennessee. He invented a circuit board where the photo-electric cell would respond to gradually changing light levels resulting in automatic street lights, the first non-mechanical switch for street lights. He then started his own company, American Electric, which specialized in outdoor lighting and continued to grow. Eventually the company moved to Southaven, Mississippi, where the company's water tower was one of the first to have a daisy on it. He obtained his pilot's license and enjoyed flying small planes. When he hurt his back in his later years, he had the company of a cat, Teddy Bear, while he was laid up in bed, and became an avid cat person for the rest of his life. He enjoyed art work, and was on the Board of the Brooks Art Museum at one time.