

High school memories of Dee Chambliss, class of '47

By: D. Ray Smith | *Historically Speaking* | The Oak Ridger | May 1, 2007

In this column of *Historically Speaking*, Dee Chambliss provides some really neat stories from his memories of Oak Ridge High School. Dee was an early editor of *The Oak Leaf* and worked at the *Knoxville Journal* and *The Oak Ridger*. He gives additional insight into the integrity and sense of fairness of Ben Martin, renowned coach in Oak Ridge's early years.

After leaving Oak Ridge, H. Darden Chambliss, known as Dee, became an award-winning business writer for the Associated Press before becoming a trade association executive and book author. Additionally, Dee attended Duke University, served in the Air Force during the Korean War, and graduated from the University of New Mexico.

Dee's career with the Associated Press saw him on assignments tracking trends in business thinking by making periodical national tours to interview corporate CEOs and economic experts. One of these tours generated a series that received a Loeb Achievement Award in 1964 for distinguished reporting of business and financial news.

In his next stop after the Associated Press, Dee became senior vice president of public policy and communications for the Aluminum Association. He later consulted for The Futures Group in Washington, D.C., and Bank of America in San Francisco.

In 1990, he wrote "The Bank of America Guide to Making the Most of Your Money," published by Dow Jones-Irwin.

He was a member of the board of the Issue Management Association and Public Relations Society of America, serving as 1975 chairman of the Association Section and as 1982 chairman of the Emerging Issues Committee.



Dee Chambliss

Let's travel with Dee down Memory Lane as he takes us back to the 1940s and his time at Oak Ridge High School.

"I was sullen when I arrived in Oak Ridge in the summer of 1944, unhappy at having been pulled out of University High School in Columbia, Mo., where I had just enjoyed a great year. I don't recall minding the Spartan existence of a flattop at 101 Eaton Lane (though my older sister June, jerked out of school just before her senior year, hated it).

"Once school started, my sophomore year, life quickly brightened. Students were friendly and welcoming, since most were also new. There were no cliques (guess no one had been around long enough to form them) and no snobbery (who knew who was rich and who wasn't? Everyone lived in more or less the same house, dads drove whatever car they had in 1942 and no one knew whose dad was a boss and whose wasn't).

"My first friends at school were the athletic de Nagy twins, Don and Bruce, who opened the door for me to the school's 'jockdom.' I was too chubby to be an athlete so I signed on as manager, first of the basketball team and then of the track team.

"Basketball coach Ben Martin told me to sit beside him during the first basketball game and write down his shouted instructions so he could reference them at half time. Remember, I was very new at this and eager to please. I wrote furiously. As we went in for the half, I gave him my pad. He looked at it and then shook his head. It contained page after page of 'Pass the ball! Pass the ball! Pass the damn ball!'

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"Once when we were playing Kingsport, one of many dread rivals, I sat at the scorer's table. The game was close when Bruce de Nagy, a star forward, committed a foul. The Kingsport scorer (the home book was official), turned to me and asked 'Which de Nagy was that?' Of course, the twins looked alike. I'm not proud of this, but I wavered and then answered 'Don,' who had fewer fouls. Driving home, Coach Martin said to me, 'I could have sworn Bruce fouled out.' I confessed what I'd done. He was grimly silent for a bit and then said gently, 'Well, never do that again.'

"Coach Martin was a sound example for us young guys. Once at Clinton, the game ended with a dispute as to which team had scored the final points. The opposing coaches and the officials argued for a bit. Then Coach Martin called his team aside and said, 'We know we won this game and we can keep arguing here all night. Or, we can agree to go into overtime to settle it. I leave it up to you. But if you decide to play an overtime period and lose, I don't want to hear a word of complaint. We'll have lost fair and square.' The team voted for overtime, and lost, and no one complained.

"Coach Martin could also be cagey when necessary, and I made him mad when I inadvertently messed up one of his maneuvers. I was a 'stringer' for The Knoxville Journal, calling in high school sports scores and doing sports stories. Before a big track meet, I wrote about Wildcat preparations and mentioned that our star high hurdler (I can't remember his name now), was injured and was out. Well, Coach Martin was negotiating with the opposing coach to drop some events (for what reason I don't remember, maybe to keep down the size of traveling squads). You see it coming: the high hurdles event was on his proposed drop list.

"My job as a stringer for the Knoxville paper had some interesting wrinkles. When I began, before the bomb, secrecy was very serious stuff. The mere fact that the city was so large — 75,000 — was itself a major secret. If they'd known, the bad guys might figure out that something big was up. My memory is that we couldn't charter a local chapter of the National Honor Society because that would require sending in names and numbers to headquarters. Same with Quill and Scroll, the honorary journalism society (when it finally was chartered, I was already graduated and working full-time on the Oak Ridge Journal; the school very graciously made me a member retroactively since I'd been editor of the Oak Leaf newspaper.)

"As a Knoxville Journal stringer, I had to clear my stories — even results of a ball game — by phone with a Capt. Brown, Army PIO. I have the clear recollection that, at first anyway, he wouldn't let me use LAST names of players. Box scores were "Tom 12, Ray 10, Bruce 4, Don 2." (That's Tom Zirkle, Bruce de Nagy, Ray Carnes and Don de Nagy.) Now, when I think back, I can't believe that a metropolitan paper such as the Journal would accept copy in that form. Still, I heard later, after the bomb, that some last names could be connected with atomic research."

Next week we will explore more of Dee's memories of Oak Ridge High School in the mid and late 1940s. We will see him describe in some detail a sweet memory of a kiss under a blossoming apple tree and admit that even today, "The barest hint of that scent invokes that glorious moment!" He will explore some of the social events he recalls and will finish by sharing his overall impression of the Oak Ridge schools.