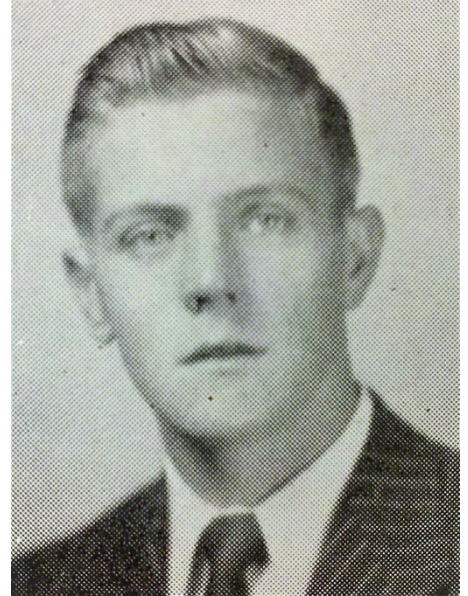


A Time of Transition

The end of World War II was a time of transition on the Clemson College campus. The fall semester of 1945 brought a 40 percent increase in the student body as many young men returned from war armed with the educational benefits of the GI Bill. The mix of returning veterans and traditional students caused college administrators to reconsider the school's requirements for participation in military training: veterans were exempted. The war years had interrupted the traditional flow of students to Clemson and fifty-six percent of the students on campus during the spring semester were freshmen, members of the Class of 1949. One of these was James Henry Pressley, Jr. from Americus, Georgia.



Pressley spent two years on campus before leaving Clemson and joining the Navy. Like the rest of the country, the Navy was also transitioning from war to peace and, like Clemson, it was involved in a significant restructuring. The National Security Act of 1947 merged the Department of War and the Department of the Navy into what became the Department of Defense. The new law also created a separate Air Force, the National Security Council, and the Central Intelligence Agency. Unification of the national military establishment was deemed critical to help the United States face emerging threats as the Cold War continued to escalate.

Cold War tensions were heightened over the fate of eastern European countries now firmly under the control of the Soviet Union. The United States had helped rebuild western Europe—including former foes Germany and Italy—and continued to promote collective defense of the continent through the 1949 establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO. France was one of the key participants in NATO.



By June 1954, Pressley had attained the rank of Lieutenant (junior grade) and was serving as a flight instructor at the Navy's aviation training command at Pensacola Naval Air Station in Florida. Pressley conducted advanced flight training in the single-engine SNJ-4 aircraft manufactured by North American Aviation.

On June 29, 1954, Pressley was instructing a French aviation cadet in the SNJ-4.

Approximately one quarter mile from Kings Field, Florida, the aircraft went out of control and crashed. Pressley was killed instantly. The French cadet was seriously injured and died a short time later.

Pressley was survived by his wife, Margaret, his parents, and sister. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

