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## In Memoriam: Rafael C. Benitez

Carl E.B. McKenry Jr.  
*University of Miami School of Law*

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## CARL E.B. MCKENRY, JR.\*

Rafael C. Benitez, an Admiral, Vice-President, Dean, and Professor, departed from us on March 6, 1999. Since his retirement he has lived on the Eastern shore of Maryland not too far from his beloved U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis where he graduated in 1939.

For most of us a single highly successful career would be a source of great pride and satisfaction. He had four such careers.

I first met Bennie (or "Rafe"—he accepted both nicknames, but I believe he preferred Rafe) about the time I was leaving the legal department of Pan American World Airways to commence a new career of teaching full time at the University of Miami. Rafe had recently retired from the U.S. Navy with the rank of Rear Admiral to become Vice-President for the Latin American Division of Pan American. His youth spent in Puerto Rico gave him a total fluency in Spanish, which was an extremely valuable combination with his executive and administrative skills. He was interested in developing joint programs and approached me concerning University of Miami co-sponsorship of an air transport symposium covering various topics applicable to commercial air carriers. This was my first exposure to his commitment and military precision in executing a project. We had high officials of the Air Transport Association, the International Air Transport Association, legal counsel from major air carriers, and representatives of major manufacturers such as Boeing and (then) Douglas in attendance. It was so successful that it was continued annually for a number of years.

Rafe became interested in the University of Miami School of Law first by teaching part time and then, upon leaving Pan American, by joining the faculty on a full time basis. The law school had a few foreign law courses, but not a formal program for foreign law students. Rafe was the founder and first director of the foreign student program. At the time he joined the faculty, there was a second publication at the law school, in addition to the *University of Miami Law Review*, titled "*The Lawyer of the Americas.*" Rafe took that modest publication and developed the

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\* Professor, University of Miami; J.D., LL.M. New York University, 1965.

*Inter-American Law Review*, now internationally recognized as a prestigious law journal.

While not seeking a permanent administrative role, Rafe served when called upon first as Associate Dean and then as Interim Dean of the School of Law. At the time I was a member of the University's central administration, and I tried to entice him to join us in the Ashe Building as Dean of the Faculties, but he would not leave his various law school activities and duties.

Subsequently, he did serve as Dean of the Graduate School of International Studies. This unit had formerly been the Center for Advanced International Studies and was under serious consideration for closure. Rafe's commitment to keep that program intact allowed further stabilization and development. It is now a full-fledged member of the University of Miami family of schools and colleges and known as the School for International Studies with both graduate and undergraduate programs.

For the earlier portion of their residence in South Florida, Rafe, his lovely wife Nancy, and their children lived in a stately columned two-story home at the intersection of Toledo and University Drive in Coral Gables. It was a superb home for entertaining not only because of its physical attractiveness but also for the cordiality that Nancy and Rafe created for their guests. Truly a family man, Rafe would counsel and work with his son, a star quarter back at Coral Gables High School who later attended the University of Virginia. Rafe never missed a game.

A modest man, he would occasionally chat at a quiet moment in the early evening about his naval experiences. My most vivid recollection is his description, as a submarine commander in World War II, of settling his craft quietly on the ocean floor to escape depth charges from Japanese warships on the surface. He was particularly eloquent in expressing his concern for his crew under such circumstances. Few of us have been called upon to execute such responsibility and dedication.

The contributions of Rafael C. Benitez as Admiral, Vice-President, Dean and Professor will continue to impact long after his departure from us.