Col. Robert Daryl Cotton, US Army (ret.)

MAR 2, 1946 - MAY 15, 2021

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Col. Robert Daryl Cotton, US Army (ret.)

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TALLAHASSEE, FL - Colonel Robert D. Cotton (Bob), 75, retired, passed away on Saturday May 15, 2021. Bob was born in Charlotte, NC on March 2, 1946. At age 5 he moved with his family to Clearwater, FL. While attending Clearwater High School he made many lifelong friends and was an active member of the student council, track, and basketball teams. Bob led the Clearwater Tornado's basketball team to victory as captain his senior year (1964).

After graduating, Bob enlisted in the United States Army. He attended basic training at Ft. Jackson, SC and advanced individual training at Ft. Devens, MA where he earned the MOS 05H, Morse Interceptor. He was promoted to Sergeant, E-5 and was selected for Infantry Officer Candidate School where he graduated as a second lieutenant. He attended airborne training at Ft. Benning, GA and the Intelligence Officer Basic Course at Ft. Holabird, MD prior to shipping out to Phung Hiep, the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. He served as a subsector intelligence advisor to the South Vietnamese Army and was involved in over 50 search and destroy operations, being injured once. During this tour of duty he was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge, the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, the Vietnam Service Medal, and the Bronze Star for Meritorious Service in Operations against hostile forces.

After his service in Vietnam, Bob attended Florida State University and was on the basketball team. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science and a Masters degree in International Relations. In 1972 he married Martha Maddox (married 21 years). Continuing his military career, he joined the 160th Military Police Battalion in the U.S. Army Reserve and branch transferred to Military Police. He served as battalion S-1, S-4, and a Command and General Staff College Instructor.

Bob realized early on that he had a passion for mentoring. This led him to pursue several different roles in education throughout his life beginning in college as a graduate assistant instructor at Florida State and later as a high school history teacher for the Hernando County School Board. He taught real estate courses at Tallahassee Community College and several

technical courses for a variety of programs at Angley and Fortis Colleges later in his career. He was an instructor at the 3391st U.S. Army Reserve Forces School in Jacksonville, Florida and was presented the Command Sergeant Major's Award for his caring leadership and team building techniques.

In the early 1980's Bob was blessed with three beautiful daughters Laura, Jennifer, and Amanda. He was a very loving father and would do anything to make his girls happy. He always put his family first. During the most difficult times he kept a strong, positive, and playful demeanor to ensure the stability and happiness of his children. He was active in his daughters' lives and took a personal interest in their development and education. He made weekly trips to their elementary school and read books to their classes. On several occasions he shared stories of his military experiences with the children's classes and brought pictures and articles from other countries for show-and-tell. He was an active member of the Parent Teacher Organization for several years, even serving as president. The girls always looked forward to surprise lunch visits with their dad at school. At home he enjoyed playing basketball and, especially, H-O-R-S-E with them. Bob was not only adored by his children but also their friends. He treated the children's friends as his own and created a welcoming and safe home environment for friends and family.

Bob had a strong work ethic with an entrepreneurial approach, a warm smile, and an ever growing repertoire of jokes that guaranteed he made friends wherever he went. He operated multiple businesses simultaneously and was always looking for new opportunities for growth. Early in his career he worked for the Florida League of Cities. He was the owner and operator of the Cactus Motel in the mid 1970's, and several years later he rehabilitated a historic home into a Bed and Breakfast. In the late 70's and early 80's, he was a partner of Wolfe and Cotton Real Estate. He was a member of the Tallahassee Board of Realtors and was a Million Dollar Producer. He spent several years at the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation and became a division director. After DBPR he worked for the Department of Health and was head of the fluoride program. He retired with the State of Florida working in the Department of Health in the inspector general's office. During his time with the State of Florida he founded a private company, Cotton Candy Vending, and continued his career with the military. Bob retired as a full Colonel from the U.S. Army Reserve in 1996 as the Commander of the Health Services Brigade in Jacksonville, Florida with almost 32 years of service.

Basketball was always a big part of Bob's life. He loved the game from a very young age and became quite good at it. He played on several teams in his early years, and he was competitive

overseas during his tour in Vietnam. After playing in college he found great pleasure in playing on his lunch break at the Christian Life Center in Tallahassee, FL. He played basketball there over the course of several decades and met many wonderful friends. It was here that he met Debra Hall and Bob became smitten. Debra and Bob's relationship grew into a loving partnership, and they became inseparable in his last years of life.

Throughout Bob's professional career he was an avid real estate investor. He enjoyed remodeling homes at night and on weekends. He found joy in bringing the properties back to life and felt a sense of accomplishment with each completed home. His unique perspective to invest in not only real estate but also the communities themselves led him to spend more of his time supporting, mentoring, and building relationships with tenants and neighbors, many of whom he considered family.

Bob lived life to the fullest. He was the ultimate repository of jokes and was well known for telling the same joke more than once. He loved spending time with his family and playing with his grandchildren. He was humble and lived a simple life, although he accomplished so much. He lived by example and encouraged others to be the best they could be.

Bob leaves behind loving friends and family including his companion Debra Hall of Quincy, FL; sister and brother in-law Marcia and Charles Everingham of Longview, TX; daughter and son-in-law Laura and Curt Mills of Tallahassee, FL; daughter Jennifer Cotton of Safety Harbor, FL; daughter and son-in-law Amanda and Brett Fox of St. Petersburg, FL; granddaughters Allyson and Georgia Grace Mills, Clara Fox, and Evelyn Rose Presbury; nieces and nephews and their families Chris Cotton (Susan), Claire Cotton, Chad Everingham (Wendi), Sarah Everingham, Teresa Everingham, childhood friend Paul (Gloria) Boisvert, former wife Martha Maddox, and a host of extended family in Florida, Texas, Georgia, and Alabama.

A memorial will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, June 4, 2021, at the Tallahassee National Cemetery, 5015 Apalachee Pkwy, Tallahassee, FL 32311.

Tribute Wall

Col. Robert Daryl Cotton, US Army (ret.)
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JO

J C Olner shared a photo to the **Memories Album** album.

June 3 at 1:44 PM

JO

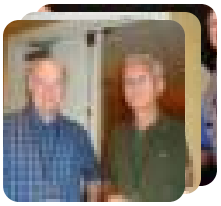
J C Olner lit a candle in honor of Robert.

May 28 at 3:58 PM

DL

Darlene Long shared an album called **Memories Album**.

May 24 at 6:51 AM



MC

Marlene Claytor lit a candle in honor of Robert.

May 20 at 12:01 PM

JO

J Olner June 2 at 3:19 PM

Bob Cotton became a part of my life early on when my family moved to Clearwater just before the beginning of my sophomore year at CHS. Basketball was a passion we both shared. We played a lot of games at Marymount and at the high school. My junior year (and Bob's senior year) we were team mates on the CHS Varsity Basketball Team. Bob was one of the 2 co-captains that year.From my association with Bob, I made a couple other lifelong friends; Darlene Dyer and Paul Boisvert. I usually had a pretty good repertoire of jokes. But there was no way I could keep up with the master, Bob Cotton. Anyone who knew Bob Cotton understands that.After HS we both ended up in the US Army. That was another shared experience we had. But we never saw each other again until we were both out of the active-duty Army.Bob and I got together over the years when I was passing thru Tallahassee on business or on my way to some other place in FL. Bob and Martha came to my wedding in Houston in 1987. The last time I saw Bob was in 2012 at Paul Boisvert's place. Bob still had more jokes than I had.Unfortunately, I no longer play basketball. I am now happy to just be able to walk and talk. And, I suspect that in the not too distance future, I will join Bob at a basketball court somewhere on the other side where we (and probably most of the rest of the team—see attached photo) can all play basketball again.Miss you Bob, see if you can get us a court/game when I get there.J. Olner

JC

Jerald Collman May 25 at 10:29 AM

Bob was quite the character. He was one of the Marymont Park group that hung out there during elementary and junior high school years. Most of us including Bob went to Skycrest Elementary, Clearwater Junior High, and Clearwater High School. Paul, Darlene, Bill, also were at FSU with Bob too. I know Paul and Bob were like brothers and was there for him all the way to the end. Bob was one of the original Tallahassee Whataburger morning breakfast's guys and as he always, Bob had a joke to tell. Sometimes Bob's wit could be challenging if you couldn't match or better him, and it was all in fun. Bob most definitely had confidence he could do anything; and he would remind you of it too. Most of us loved him and knew he had a great heart of kindness. Jerry Collman

DL

Darlene Long May 24 at 6:45 AM

We have known Bob since Clearwater High School. He was a friend in Tallahassee while at FSU and later when he married and started his family. He was always a person who liked to kid and make you laugh or get you aggravated. We had not seen him in recent years, but ran into him once in awhile. I know he was still active, and Paul would keep me informed of how Bob was doing. He had a good life, and did many important things. I remember him saying in

MC

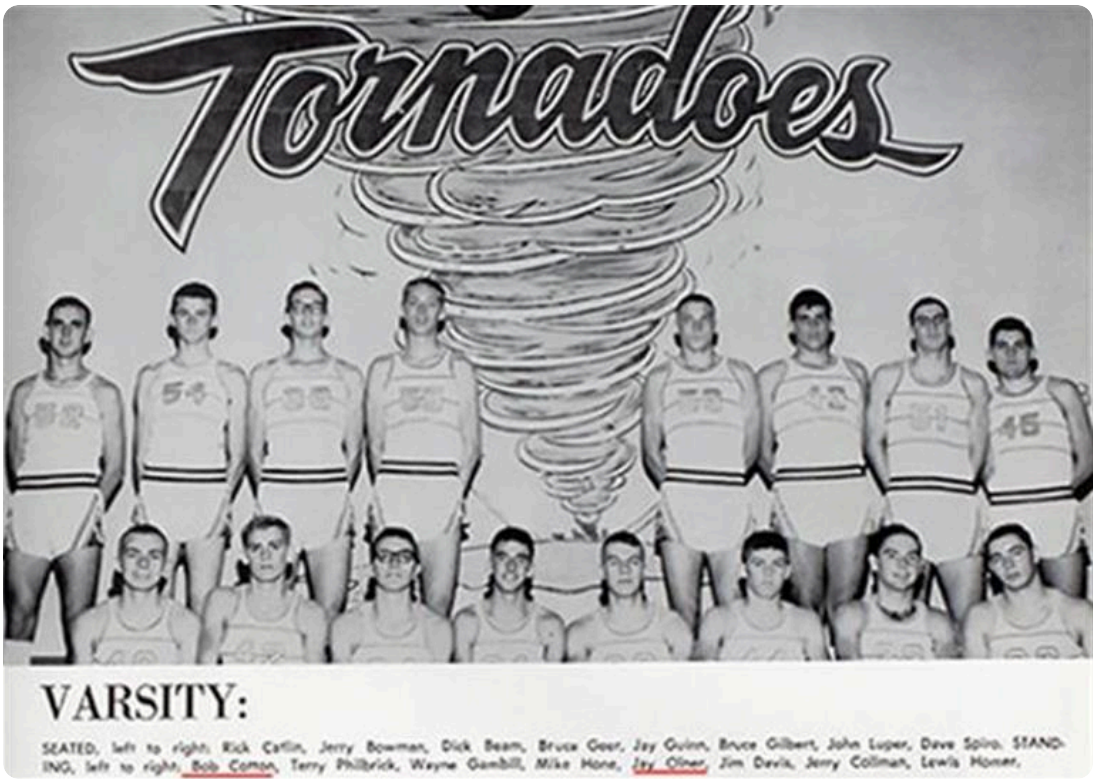
high school that he would be president someday. He met many other goals in life. He will be missed.

DL **Diana Ledbetter** May 22 at 7:11 PM
Every time we met through the years, Bob, we just picked up where we left off. You would hurl a jest at me and I would struggle to repel it and throw one back at you. You always won. I don't think I've ever met anyone as quick witted as you. Underneath all this verbal warfare there was a true friendship and mutual admiration. Your daughters have inherited this trait and others from you. They are all so smart, so beautiful and so tall! One day, Bob, we'll meet again and we'll pick up where we left off. Can't wait!Diana Ledbetter

MC **Marlene Claytor** May 20 at 12:13 PM
I'm stunned at your passing. The last time we spoke, I told you that we would always be friends.....forever. And now, your time has come, and I simply have no words. Thank you for the friendship we've shared these last 5 years. You were a man of honor and kindness, and I will miss you. I love you Bob Cotton! Rest well my friend.....

JO

J C Olner shared a photo to the **Memories Album** album. June 3 at 1:44 PM



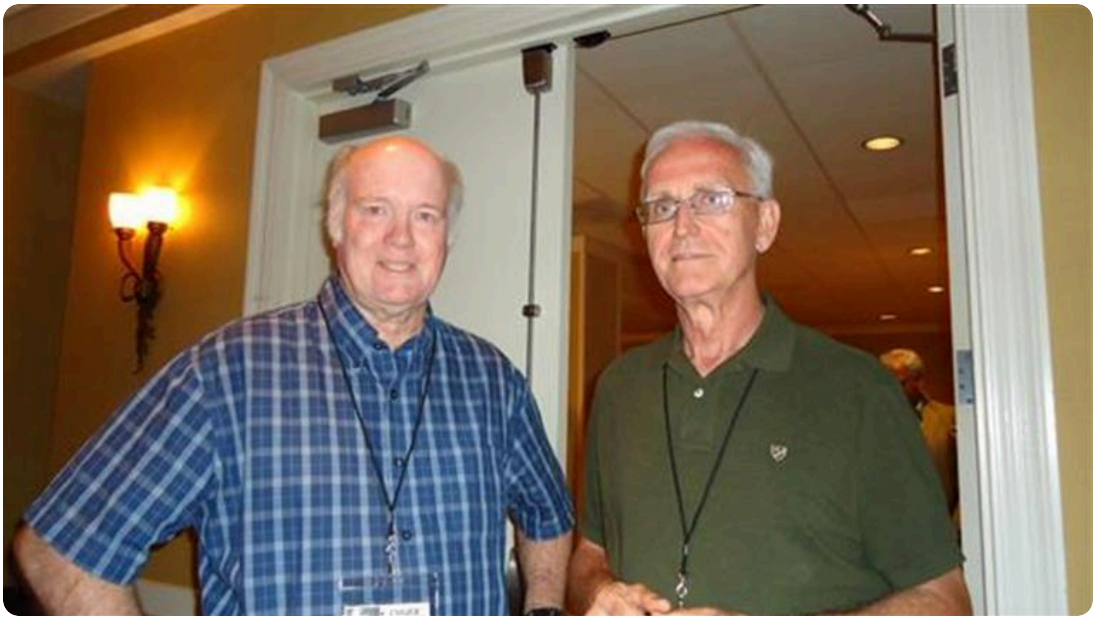
1963-64 CHS Varsity Basketball Team

DL

Darlene Long shared 3 photos to the **Memories Album** album. May 24 at 6:51 AM

CHS 50th Reunion

CHS 50th Reunion



CHS 50th Reunion

Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Robert by contributing to a collection of shared memories.

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