

Fighter Pilot

For a kid born during World War II, it must have seemed like the ultimate goal: becoming a fighter pilot! The fighter aces of that war had been heroes, their names familiar to a whole generation of boys growing up 1950s. And now, Roy Bratton was following in their footsteps.

Roy Donald Bratton grew up in the Union County crossroads town of Adamsburg and attended Lockhart High School. A football, basketball and baseball letterman, Roy continued to be active in athletics when he arrived at Clemson in the fall of 1962. He worked as a manager of the football team and was a member of the weightlifting club. A mechanical engineering major, Roy was selected for membership in the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and served as president of the Union County Club. He also excelled as an Air Force ROTC cadet.



"Roy was our squadron commander in Air Force ROTC at Clemson 1965-66. He was not fake or flashy, just quiet and very human," remembered Larry Lott, who like Roy would go on to serve in Vietnam. "He was about the nicest person you could know, always ready to help and easy to be around," classmate James Stepp recalled. "The things about Roy I most remember are his grin - it was kinda a wiry crooked grin... and the fact that he was such a nice and likeable person."

"Roy was a happy and upbeat guy who always had a joke," said classmate Harold Allen, a description amplified by Allen Hobbs who lived down the hall from Roy. "I remember Roy as being a very cheerful guy who was always upbeat and greeted everyone with a smile...he had lots of friends at Clemson."

Following graduation in the Class of 1966, Roy reported for active duty in February 1967. After a year of flight training, he earned his wings and was soon on his way to Vietnam. By now a first lieutenant, Roy was assigned to the 421st Tactical Fighter Squadron based at Da Nang Air Base. The 421st flew the F-4D Phantom fighter in ground support missions—missions that put the pilots and their aircraft in harm's way.

Roy Bratton continued to excel as an Air Force pilot. For a mission on May 10, 1969, Roy was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for making



repeated, dangerous low level bombing and strafing runs that led to the rescue of a reconnaissance team. A second award of the DFC was made for a June 21 mission in which Roy attacked a “vital military supply link in an extremely heavily defended area.” The success of this mission destroyed the target and denied its use to the enemy.

On August 4, while flying a support mission for ground operations, Roy’s aircraft was shot down in Quang Nam Province. His body was recovered and buried in the cemetery of the Philippi Baptist Church in Union. First Lieutenant Roy Donald Bratton was survived by his mother Sadie Adams Bratton and his sister, Mrs. Ruth Sweatt. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with one Oak Leaf Cluster; Purple Heart; Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation with Palm, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. He is listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall on Panel 20W, Line 94; His name is also listed on the Vietnam Conflict Memorial to Union County natives in Union.

