

Request Honored

Before a particularly dangerous mission during the Vietnam War, Air Force pilot Ryan Cobb recorded an audio tape for his family. In his message, the unmarried Cobb asked his younger brother Styles and sister-in-law Sandy to name a son after him if he did not return.

Ryan Cole Cobb of Starr, graduated as the salutatorian of his Crescent High School Class of 1963. He enrolled at Clemson that fall, before Vietnam became familiar to most Americans. While he was a student, Clemson “graduated” from a college to full university status. Cobb, an English major, loved to read and was active in campus life. He served four years as student senator, including a term on the senate’s academic affairs committee. His political interests weren’t limited to the confines of the campus as Cobb also served as a delegate to the South Carolina State Student Legislature and was a member of the Young Republicans. He liked to sing too and was a member of the Glee Club and the Men’s Quartet.



Following his 1967 graduation, Cobb was commissioned in the Air Force and flew in the F-4 Phantom, a tandem two-seat, twin-engine, all-weather, jet fighter-bomber used by the Air Force, Navy and Marines in a variety of configurations and missions.

During his time in Vietnam, Cobb was awarded four Distinguished Flying Crosses and fifteen other medals. And, fortunately, he returned from that hazardous mission.

After promotion to the rank of captain, Cobb transferred into the Air Force Reserves. On August 27, 1980, Cobb was flying out of Homestead Air Force Base in Florida as the navigator on F-4C 64-0804. Cobb’s unit was participating in exercises off the Florida coast. During the mission, while over the open ocean, a malfunction occurred in the aircraft and Cobb was ejected from the plane. The pilot’s ejection seat was also triggered, but failed to operate properly and he was able to remain in the plane and return to land. Flares ejected near the site of the ejection failed to illuminate and the ejection seat’s raft failed to inflate. Despite an intensive three-day search, Cobb’s body was never recovered.

Five years after Ryan Cobb’s untimely death, Styles and Sandy welcomed their third child and first son. They named him Ryan Cole Cobb II. Sadly, Styles, also a Clemson graduate, died of illness in 1990.

Ryan Cole Cobb was survived by his parents, Cole and Georgianne Cobb, three sisters and his brother. He is memorialized at South Lawn Memorial Gardens in Anderson, South Carolina.

