

## Tribute to LeRoy Collins Jr., by Forrest ("Ted") Gay, Brigadier General, U. S. Army

As I stand here today looking out onto this large crowd I see many faces: family, friends and distinguished guests. I consider it to be one of the highest honors to be asked to speak for my friend. Roy Collins is one of the finest people I've ever known and one of the best friends I've ever had.



I had known Jane's family for many years, but I had never met Roy until Christmas of '62. After visiting my family in Tampa I needed a ride back to my duty station in Washington, DC. My cousin, Sara Charles, suggested riding with Roy who was headed back driving his father's vintage Lincoln – and a lasting friendship was formed on the long drive north. We found we had a lot in common – we both were Eagle Scouts, we both went to a military prep school, we both graduated from a service academy, we were both native Floridians and we were both working in the nuclear power field, he in submarines, me in land-based units.

Even though I had known Jane's family, Roy had not met her until his childhood friend, Coyle Moore, played matchmaker and brought Carol Jane Sisson into his life on a blind date. From that meeting came a loving marriage, 4 beautiful children and 8 grandchildren. Jane's capabilities, love and support were the foundation on which this partnership of 51 years was built. Roy's intense love of family was clearly evident each time he spoke of Jane and the family. There was a special sparkle in his eye reserved just for them. He would regale me with tales of his kids such as Carol Jane, Gregg and the kids vacationing on Gregg's family's island in Canada. Call and her rowing prowess. Ed and his cattle farm. Roy's many adventures in Spain and his help with the Senate campaign.

Our friendship flourished over the years. We visited often, enjoying each other's company. One weekend in 1964 he and Jane invited me to their home in Newport News to meet a young lady that Roy had known since grade school who was visiting them from Winter Park. I must say THAT blind date worked out very well also, because 2 years later, with Roy as my best man, that young lady became my bride.

Toward the end of his active duty, he invited me to join him at Cape Canaveral to observe the test of the Polaris missiles on the newly commissioned Fleet Ballistic Missile Submarine *James Madison*. He was the weapons officer and told me, "I have the finger on the nuclear trigger!" and he also told me that he exercised that finger every day to make sure he was prepared! After the weapons test on the way back to port in Charleston, with his father, Governor Collins and myself as passengers, the captain conducted some high speed maneuvers. Roy chuckled when I had to grab the bulkhead to keep from falling. Governor Collins knew his boy was thoroughly enjoying every last minute of this high speed ride.



While we were both in Washington, we enjoyed trips to the ski slopes of Seven Springs, Pennsylvania. There we always had a competition for the fastest ski in the east. You know who won that one if you know who did his first parachute jump at 70 or who drove his Model T on the sidewalk of his high school as a teenager. I didn't know until last week his nickname as a midshipman was "Crazylegs". That now puts in perspective the way he skied down those slopes.

We camped together, all 4 of us, at Ft. DeSoto when I was stationed at MacDill, sharing one small pop-up tent, outdoor "facilities" and countless mosquitoes. You really have to be good friends to enjoy that.

On one visit to our home when our daughter, Mary Priscilla, was in kindergarten, she would NOT go to her piano lesson without her Uncle Roy. She wanted him for "Show & Tell." When they got to the lesson her teacher had Roy play her practice piece, which he did to their applause. He obviously never met a keyboard he didn't like. He even played the pipe organ at our church in Alexandria, Virginia.

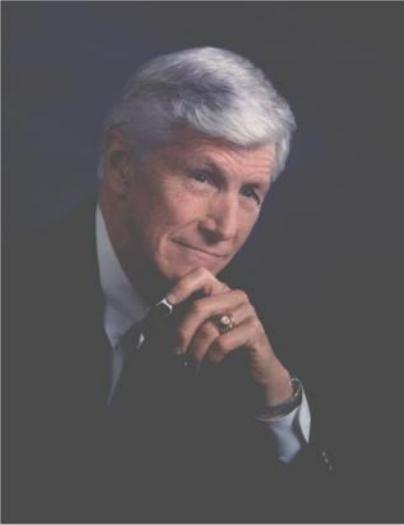
One instrument that did not get a resounding round of applause was the recent addition of the viola to his instrument repertoire. He had proudly practiced "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," which he played for his mother, to which she responded "Oh, Roy, that's just awful! Don't ever play that again!!"

His love of music might have been equaled by his love of fruit splendas. If he and Jane have visited you, then you have had one of these famous concoctions. This devotion to a healthy lifestyle had him waking up early every morning to bike, row and swim. An avid sailor, he would often venture out into the bay with family and friends on both his sailboat and his powerboat. I wish we all could be as active and fit as he was.

Over the years we have shared each others triumphs and sorrows, mostly triumphs: such as Roy's great success with Armed Forces Financial Network: he was proud to bring modern banking, including ATMs, to *(continued)*

every military installation around the world, including ships at sea. I was proud when he accompanied me to the 20th anniversary celebration of the completion of the Tennessee Tombigbee Waterway, my last project in the Corps of Engineers.

About 10 years ago, three wise men - Roy, Ed Debarba and myself - made a small investment in a company named Black Light Power, which promised to end America's dependence on foreign oil. We attended annual shareholder meetings at their headquarters in Princeton, located near many important Revolutionary War battlefields. That prompted us to study more about that period and to visit some of those sites at the same time. We visited the site of Washington's Crossing of the Delaware, the battles of Trenton, Princeton, Saratoga, Monmouth Courthouse and toured the encampment at Valley Forge. Even a submariner could enjoy that.



I said both of us went to Service Academies. I chose West Point. Roy, unfortunately, chose the OTHER one – so that made our frequent trips to the Army-Navy Game very interesting. Especially since I bought the tickets and he had to sit on the Army side! In years when we couldn't go, the winner made the practice of calling the loser and singing either "On Brave Old Army Team," or "Anchors Away." I've been hearing that water-logged song far too often lately!! (Incidentally, you Navy guys, the new Army coach says we are going to win this year). Jane, be expecting a call later this year.

His conscience and his convictions led him on a straight and narrow path. When he thought the Senate candidates in 2006 were sending the wrong messages, he moved in with a campaign based on truth and integrity. Even though he didn't win, he impressed all with his enthusiasm for service to his state and his country.

But his assignment to head Florida's VA really seemed to put everything together for him: military service, compassion for your fellow man, duty, service to country. One of his real passions was his attempt to create a Foundation that would help to honor and care for our wounded veterans. And that foundation is now in place: the Florida Veterans Foundation.

A USNA classmate, 4 Star Admiral James Hogg, wrote of Roy's dedication to the VA. He writes: *"I was involved recently with a Navy veteran who was having an impossible time working with the VA Administration to achieve the disability benefits he deserved. In fact, neither of us was able to penetrate the VA front office and talk to the VA director in Washington. That is, until I introduced my friend to Roy. Almost overnight, the whole atmosphere at VA changed to "all positive", people started listening, and things started falling into place."*

Here I have been describing a man of total honesty, rock-solid integrity, one who loves his country, loves his family, is loyal to a fault, and is always in unflinching good humor. He has expressed his philosophy of life in his blog, where he wrote:

*"And so, now I enter into this new season of my life unprepared for all the aches and pains and the loss of strength and ability to go and do things that I wish I had done but never did,*

*"But, at least I know, that though the winter has come, and I'm not sure how long it will last ... this I know, that when it's over ... it's over. Yes, I have regrets. There are things I wish I hadn't done, things I should have done, but indeed, there are many things I'm happy to have done. It's all in a lifetime.*

*"Life goes by quickly. So, do what you can today, as you can never be sure whether this is your winter or not.*

*"Life is a gift to you. The way you live your life is your gift to those who come after. Make it a fantastic one."*

I would like to end with an observation. Back in the late 60's on a visit to the Collins family in Miami the 4 of us went to John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. There Roy and I took his boat out to the reef, donned goggles and snorkels and searched for the statue of Christ of the Deep. We never found Christ then, but I know that Roy has now met the Master face to face!

