

Lt. General O.R. "Cotton" Whiddon Biography

Lieutenant General Orren Ray 'Cotton'. Whiddon, a sixth generation Texan. was born in Joaquin, Texas on March 10, 1935 on land his third Great grandfather Elijah Morris obtained in a headright from the Mexican government in 1834, just before the Texas Revolution. His parents, Orren Cox Whiddon and Cynthia Cockrell Whiddon owned and operated Crystal Lake, the legendary East Texas water park in Joaquin. The original Crystal Lake was built in 1920 by Abner Odern Whiddon, Cotton's grandfather. The darn that held Crystal Lake washed away in 1933. Cotton, his brother Abner and his sister Susan. helped their parents rebuild and later run the new Crystal Lake from 1946 to 1986. Maintaining his family and community ties to Joaquin and East Texas remained a priority throughout his life, no matter where he was stationed in the world.

Cotton graduated from Joaquin High School in 1952 and was involved in their alumni association for many years. He graduated from Stephen F. Austin College with a degree in Chemistry in 1955 and soon after received his draft notice. Thus began his lifelong love affair with the Army. Before being inducted, he married Harriot Jane McKinney of Nacogdoches. He was 20 and she was 17. They had a loving marriage for over 60 years and a successful partnership in the Army. Cotton completed Officers Candidate School (OCS) in 1956 and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, Field Artillery. He is the highest ranking Army officer to be drafted from Texas.

Cotton valued education and often said "an education is something no one can ever take away from you". In addition to receiving his Masters in Management from the University of Southern California, he also was a graduate of the Army Command & General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and the United States Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island. He was inducted into the SFA Alumni Hall of Fame in 1988. The Whiddon ROTC Scholarship at SFA is endowed in his name and the howitzer fired at the SFA home games is named "Ole Cotton" in his honor because of his work with the ROTC program there.