

A Tribute to Dr. Tyrus Cobb (LtC. USA Retired)
Founder of the National Security Forum
Offered by R.M. Huffstutler

Ty Cobb, one can say without exaggeration, was “a man of many parts.” His roots in Reno led him to a career in the military where he became one of those rare “soldier/scholars” who exerted subtle influence on the course of our foreign policies and military perceptions during the Cold War. He was a deeply thoughtful and probing man who could assess foreign rivals without demonizing them, a prerequisite to recognizing repressed internal opposition and secret leadership splits. And from his academic background at the U.S. Military Academy teaching Soviet Affairs, he emerged onto the Washington policy scene at a critical era of the Cold War.

By the end of the Carter Administration, relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union were severely strained. The Soviets had invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, causing President Carter to withdraw the proposed SALT III Treaty from ratification in the Senate and to boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow.

President Reagan was elected in November 1980 and faced truly unsettled times. Prior to his inauguration, I had occasion to brief the President elect and some of his cabinet nominees on the Soviet strategic threat. The news was not good and the President elect would have to deal with a number of complex challenges.

Once in office, he did not have to wait long. Early on, the Soviets declared Marshall law in Poland and the President imposed economic sanctions on them and labeled them the “evil empire.” Less than two years later, a Soviet interceptor shot down Korean Air Lines 007 in the Sea of Japan. The U.S. deployed Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles in Europe and the Soviets walked out of the struggling arms control talks in Geneva. This was the international environment in 1983 when Ty Cobb arrived at the National Security Council to take on his new responsibilities to advise President Reagan on Soviet relations.

Fortunately, International relations have their ups as well as their downs. By 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became the new General Secretary of the Communist Party in the USSR and the dialogue between the President and the General Secretary began to thaw. This led to a series of summits such as Reykjavik in 1986 where they discussed abolishing all nuclear weapons and where, parenthetically, Ty Cobb was the primary NSC Staff planner. In 1987, they signed

an Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty which eliminated an entire class of nuclear weapons. And in 1988, President Reagan stood in Red Square in Moscow and declared that the “evil empire” belonged to another era.

Ty Cobb was a part of all of this, serving under President Reagan on the National Security Council and as Special Assistant to the President from 1983 until the end of the President’s term in 1989.

On leaving government and returning home to Reno, Ty served in various capacities as lecturer, advisor and commentator. But he had an entrepreneurial side to him and was not content simply to talk. In 1991, Ty became the President of Business Executives for National Security. Later, in 2009, he established the National Security Forum in Reno to afford local members an opportunity to discuss current issues and to hear from experts in the national security field.

I respect Ty Cobb for his astute analytical capabilities and his many contributions to this nation’s security. I am grateful to Ty Cobb for his contributions to this community, most particularly for his pioneering work in fostering enlightened discussions of complex but significant national security topics such as those we address in our National Security Forum. Ty made that happen.

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