



WILLIAM THOMAS MCELRATH

OCT 30, 1933 - SEP 8, 2021



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Colonel William Thomas McElrath October 30, 1933 – September 8, 2021

Colonel William Thomas “Bill” McElrath, 87, of Miami, Florida, passed away peacefully on September 8, 2021. A beloved father, grandfather, husband and uncle, he was born October 30, 1933 in Cedar Bluff, Alabama to William Coker McElrath and Mildred Wilson McElrath. William grew up in Cedar Bluff and Rome, Georgia. He graduated from the University of Georgia and completed graduate studies at Georgia State University and the University of Miami. He entered the United States Army in 1955 as an infantry officer and later became an Army aviator, retiring as a Colonel. His military service included tours of duty as Company and Battalion Commander, Air Cavalry Troop Operations Officer and Chief of infantry Officer, Worldwide Assignments Officer and Military Personnel Center. He was also a Professor of Military Science at the University of Miami.

During his 24 years of active military service, William served abroad in Germany, Korea and two combat tours in Vietnam. He was awarded numerous military honors for his achievements and bravery, including two Legions of Merit, two Meritorious Service Medals, the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Bronze Star Medals (one for valor), five Air Medals, and the Gallantry Cross with Silver Star, presented by the Republic of Viet Nam for heroism under fire.

Following his military retirement in 1979, William served as Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies in the School of Business Administration at the University of Miami for 20 years. He was responsible for the administration and academic counseling of over 10,000 undergraduate business students. In recognition of his excellence and dedication he was inducted into Iron Arrow, the highest honor attained at the University. He was especially proud of his work advising members of the University of Miami’s championship Miami Hurricanes football teams, many of whom were students in the School of Business Administration. An avid Hurricanes fan, William rarely missed one of their games and even traveled to away games with the team while employed at the University. Upon retirement, he traveled extensively with his wife, Gail, visiting seven continents and over 80 countries.

Colonel McElrath resided in the South Dade area of Miami, Florida, since 1975, first in Cutler Bay



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and then in Redland, Florida. He loved his property in Redland and spent many happy days and hours there tending to his house and garden. His home was the location of innumerable joyous family occasions and parties over the years. In addition to being a courageous, decorated Army officer and respected academic, Bill will be best remembered as a family man – Dad to his kids, Papa and Grandad to his grandchildren and “The Colonel” to everyone else – who loved spending his time laughing, telling tall tales, making sure everyone was fed and enjoying the full, rich and well-lived life he created.

William was predeceased by his wife Florine Leming McElrath, mother of his six children, who passed away in 1977, and his wife, Dr. Gail Hills, who passed away in 2016. He is survived by his children Ann (Terry); Richard (Kathleen); Mary Jane; Nancy (Tom); Catherine and Sarah (Ron) and his grandchildren, Dan (Meaghan) Caroline (Michael), Benjamin and Leah.

Additionally, he is survived by his niece, Melinda (Bill) and her children, Haley and Rick, and four stepchildren: Rebecca (Joe), Rafael (Karen), Kerry (Neal) and Allison (Kyle), as well as his step grandchildren: Ian and Matthew; Sofia and Anthony; Megan and Fiona; and Liam and Declan.

Colonel McElrath was a member of Silver Palm United Methodist Church in Homestead, Florida. Private services will be held at the South Florida National Cemetery at a later date. Please contact the family for details.

When I'm gone

Please don't cry.

Smile, because I was here!

I may be gone physically,

However, I'm with you always.

If at times, things are not going so well

Think of me...talk with me,

Someway, somehow

We will make it better.

Treat everyone fair and true,

Much more will be returned to you.

There is nothing that can't be made better.

When you remember to use enthusiasm and love as your guide.



Tribute Wall

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TO

Tom Olsen posted:

I showed up for my first ever ROTC drill day as a freshman in September of 1977 .Clueless , I had never donned a uniform , and didn't even know I was to secure the tips of my boot laces into my boot tops. So , off I went , laces flapping in the breeze .It was PT test day , and I performed well enough to get noticed . At the conclusion of the day , as I walked by Col. MacElrath , he voiced for me to come to him. Scared witless , I approached him with all the military bearing I could muster , seeing as I knew nothing .He then complimented me on my effort that day , and that he was pleased that myself and other young freshman had made the decision to serve our country . He then looked at me with a bit of a smirk , and said , in that sweet Georgia drawl of his" Well son , if we can get you to cut that red hair and lose that Boston accent , you just might stick around a while ". Your father was the type of man who , when he said " good morning " to you , meant it . I continued to have long , meaningful talks with him as I completed my degree in the School of Business once he had begun his new career .It was an honor , and a distinct privilege , to have known him .Tom OlsenViera ,Florida

October 10 at 9:09 AM

GC

Gregg Chislett shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

COL McElrath was my Professor of Military Science for my first couple of years at the University of Miami. I owe my Army career to him. He awarded me a scholarship, enabling me to attend the U of M and obtain a commission in the US Army. He was an inspiration to many, and through his leadership and inspiration he was able to shape the lives of many college students into soldiers and officers of the US Army.Gregg ChislettUS Army RetiredUM Class of 1982



October 10 at 4:44 AM

DH

Donna Hills posted:

Thinking of your family as you move forward without him. In the years he was married to my sister Gail, they gave me hope that love can survive and flourish in the last decades of life. My favorite picture of them was on the Jazz cruise with the caption, " Happy Together". Hope they are happy together again. Bill, I will miss you calling me 'sister'.

September 19 at 7:04 AM



Gregg Chislett shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

October 10 at 4:44 AM



Receiving my scholarship in 1978.



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring WILLIAM by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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