



Col. Russell Leslie Williamson

August 10, 1942 - June 12, 2024

Husband, Father, Grandfather, Vietnam veteran, commercial airline pilot, and Brangus cattle rancher Colonel Russell Leslie Williamson passed away peacefully at home on Wednesday, June 12, 2024, at the age of 81, after a second battle with cancer.

Russ was born August 10, 1942, in Plymouth, IN to Helen and Lester Williamson, and graduated from Etna Green High School, where he was President and Salutatorian of his senior class and earned twelve varsity letters in basketball, baseball, track, and cross-country. Growing up on the family farm with his siblings Nancy, James, and Mike, who raised corn, soybeans, pigs, chickens, and about 100 Registered Angus cattle. As a leader in the local 4-H club, Russ started showing Angus steers at the age of 8 and continued until he graduated HS. In 1960, he attended Manchester College for over two and a half years, continuing in basketball and cross-country, before deciding to enlist in the United States Marine Corps.

In September 1962, he enlisted in the Marine Corps as a Marine Aviation Cadet and commenced his flight training at Pensacola, FL in February 1963. He received his instrument rating and made his first Carrier landings in the T-2 on the USS Lexington in the Gulf of Mexico. Marine Aviation Cadet Williamson was transferred to Beeville, TX where he flew the F-9, TF-9 Cougar, and the F-11 Tiger, and finished the advanced training course with instruments,

tactics, bombing, air to air gunnery and more carrier landings on the USS Lexington. It was then after 18 months of rigorous training that Russ received his Wings of Gold and his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the US Marine Corps in September 1964. He then joined his first squadron in October 1964 flying the A-4 Skyhawk for VMA-223 at Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, CA. In August 1965, LtCol Williamson deployed with VMA-223 to Chu Lai, South Vietnam where he completed almost 400 combat missions in the A-4 and O-1C.

Upon completion of his tour with VMA-223 in January 1967, LtCol Williamson reported for flight instructor duty at the Naval Air Advanced Training Command at NAS, Beeville, TX where he flew the F-9 and TF-9J aircraft and served in the collateral duties of Landing Signal Officer and aircraft carrier landing instructor, logging over 1,500 hours. It was in Beeville that he met his first wife, Kathleen Sims (Wilson) and had his only child, James Russell Williamson in 1968.

LtCol Williamson left active duty in July 1969 to pursue a career with Braniff International Airlines and to fly the F-8 Crusader with the VMFA-112 "Cowboys". Furloughed four months later by Braniff, he then re-entered active duty at MCAS El Toro flying the A-4 for VMA-214. LtCol Williamson again deployed overseas. Upon completion of his second tour was transferred to VMAT-203 at MCAS Cherry Point, NC.

In June 1973, LtCol Williamson again left active duty to resume his career with Braniff and rejoin the "Cowboys" to see the transition of the F-8 Crusader to the F-4 Phantom in 1976, serve as NATOPS Officer, Administrative Officer, Operation Officer, Executive Officer, and assume command of VMFA-112 in August 1981.

LtCol Williamson has more than 5,200 total flight hours in fighters and is a

veteran of 400 combat missions. His decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross Medal, twenty-two Air Medals, Presidential Unit Citation, Navy Unit Commendation, Organized Marine Corps Reserve Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

Braniff International declared bankruptcy in 1982 and he found new employment at Piedmont Airlines, who were expanding and in need of experienced pilots. Piedmont eventually merged with US Airways, where he continued his career until he reached the mandatory retirement age of 60 in 2002. During that time, LtCol Williamson remained in the Marines and was selected to command VMFA-112 in 1982 and then aircraft Group 42 after he was promoted to Colonel, and ultimately retired from the Marines in 1986 with 26 years of service.

While still serving as a full-time active commercial airline pilot, and not being one to stand still, Russ purchased his first ranch in Athens, TX in 1980, along with a few Registered Beefmaster cows. He had always missed the cattle he had enjoyed as a young man and named his ranch "Skyhawk", the jet that he loved to fly and the jet that took care of him during the Vietnam War. He soon transitioned from Beefmaster to Registered Brangus and eventually settled in Tyler, TX on a 200+ acre ranch near Lake Tyler.

Russ has now been a member of the International Brangus Breeders Association (IBBA) for over 30 years and operates a herd of about 200 head registered cattle and has raised numerous, well-known show animals of which the most well-known is Skyhawk's Presidente. Presidente was 2008 Show Bull of the Year and was 2011 Show Sire of the Year. Russ was also awarded the 2011 IBBA Herdsman of the Year at the Houston International Livestock Show.

Russ lived out his “retirement” doing what he loved, raising Brangus cattle, and was devoted to the improvement of the breed. Some of his best moments were teaching and handing down his knowledge and skills to the younger generation. Russ was a Texas Brangus Breeders Association (TBBA) Board member for 4 years and served as President. As a testament to his work in the industry, IBBA awarded him the Jake White Lifetime Achievement Award in 2023 to “recognize an individual who has dedicated years to promoting and exhibiting Brangus cattle.”

Russ is preceded in death by his older brother James, his parents Helen and Lester, and his second wife of 36 years, Toni (Kirklin) from Alzheimer’s.

He leaves behind his always supportive, patient, and loving wife, Pam Williamson. His son James Williamson and his wife Lydia, and three grandsons; Wyatt, Owen, and Dean. Stepdaughters Julie King and Lisa Robertson, grandchildren Carson Williams, Tanner Sult, Anna and Sean King, and two great-grandchildren, McKenna Hollis and Weston King. His big sister Nancy Fites and little brother Michael Williamson, both still reside in Indiana.

Russ was a leader in his personal life, as a Marine, an airline Captain, and the Brangus community.

A celebration of life will be held at Stewart Family Funeral Home, 7525 Old Jacksonville Highway, Tyler, TX 75703, (903)581-2008, on Saturday, July 13, 2024, 9am receiving, 10am service. In lieu of flowers, donations in Russ’s honor are welcome at the Semper Fi & America’s Fund, thefund.org or the Texas Junior Brangus Breeders Association, Russ Williamson Memorial Scholarship, to Pam Williamson with memo for “Russ Williamson Scholarship Fund” at 13140 CR 285, Tyler TX 75707.

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL 13. 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM (CT)

Stewart Family Funeral Home
7525 Old Jacksonville Hwy
Tyler, TX 75703
(903) 581-2008

Memorial Service

JUL 13. 10:00 AM (CT)

Stewart Family Funeral Home
7525 Old Jacksonville Hwy
Tyler, TX 75703
(903) 581-2008

Tribute Wall



“ Stewart Family Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson



Stewart Family Funeral Home - June 24, 2024 at 07:57 PM

RP

You were truly a great friend, CO and Marine. We will forever miss you Pepe'. God Speed

Rich Piasecki - July 01, 2024 at 05:19 PM

DH

“ Capt Russ Williamson was my LSO when I carrier qualified on the USS Lexington in the TF-9J with VT-25. After receiving my wings, I subsequently was “plowed back” to VT-25 where I served along side Russ as a flight instructor. I have fond memories of Russ and am sorry to hear of his passing.

Duncan Hudnall - March 22, 2025 at 08:57 PM

HF

“ Hilbig Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.

Hilbig Family - July 12, 2024 at 05:27 PM

HF

“ Hilbig Family purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.



Hilbig Family - July 12, 2024 at 05:27 PM

LP

“ Love, Mark, Tammy, Mason & Megan Perry planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.

Love, Mark, Tammy, Mason & Megan Perry - July 12, 2024 at 11:28 AM



“ Large Basket Garden was purchased for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.



July 12, 2024 at 11:28 AM

SW

“ Shawn & Wayne Knox, Katy, Paul and Wyatt Wunderlich purchased the Country Basket Blooms for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.



Shawn & Wayne Knox, Katy, Paul and Wyatt Wunderlich -
July 11, 2024 at 06:34 PM

SF

“ Steve/Brenda / Mike/ Denise and family!! planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.

Steve/Brenda / Mike/ Denise and family!! - July 11, 2024 at 12:30 PM

SF

“ Steve/Brenda / Mike/ Denise and family!! purchased the Rainbow Of Remembrance Spray for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.



Steve/Brenda / Mike/ Denise and family!! - July 11, 2024 at 12:30 PM

PA

“ Patricia A. planted a grove of 25 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.

Patricia A. - July 10, 2024 at 09:54 PM

LP

“ Love always, Ken & Patty planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.

Love always, Ken & Patty - July 10, 2024 at 09:51 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.*



July 10, 2024 at 09:51 PM



“ *Morrows, Warners, Bruces, Kate, Libby&Heath purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.*



Morrows, Warners, Bruces, Kate, Libby&Heath - July 10, 2024 at 07:03 PM



“ *Morrows, Warners, Bruces, Kate, Libby&Heath planted a Memorial Tree in honor of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.*

Morrows, Warners, Bruces, Kate, Libby&Heath - July 10, 2024 at 07:03 PM



“ *Texas Brangus Breeders Assn. planted a Memorial Tree in honor of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.*

Texas Brangus Breeders Assn. - July 08, 2024 at 04:45 PM



“ *Magnificent Life Spray was purchased for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.*



July 08, 2024 at 04:45 PM



“ *Kevin & Laurie Pawelek planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.*

Kevin & Laurie Pawelek - July 08, 2024 at 11:00 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.*



July 08, 2024 at 11:00 AM



“ 335 files added to the album *LifeTributes*



Stewart Family Funeral Home - June 24, 2024 at 03:45 PM



“ *Sacred Duty Spray* was purchased for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.



June 24, 2024 at 09:59 AM



“ *Rita Turner* purchased the *Easy Bee-zy Knock Out Rose* for the family of Col. Russell Leslie Williamson.



Rita Turner - June 21, 2024 at 03:16 PM