



William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea

October 12, 1946 - March 31, 2019

William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea

October 1946 - March 2019

CSM William L. Rhea peacefully entered the Joy of the Lord on Sunday, March 31, 2019 in Killeen, TX.

William was born Columbus Day 1946 to Madia Vember Callahan and Christopher Columbus Rhea, Sr., the seventh child and second boy of eight children. He grew up in the Johnson City, TN Carnegie community where he attended and graduated from Douglas Elementary School. William attended and excelled academically and in sports, graduating Valedictorian from Langston High School in 1964. He was Class Secretary, a member of Hi-Y and an outstanding player for both Langston High School Tiger football and basketball teams. He faithfully attended the church of his childhood, Church of Our Lord Jesus, Johnson City, TN, and Eastlake Baptist Church, Killeen, TX. He supported several church fellowships and youth scholarships.

Although Will received offers from several colleges outside Tennessee, finance influenced his decision to attend East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN. After one year at ETSU, due to a knee injury and the need to work full time, he chose to follow his dream to enter the United States Army. William remained in uniform over 30 years! He advanced and attained the highest enlisted position of Command Sergeant Major, directing as many as

3000 soldiers. He retired September 1997. For multiple years, Will was highlighted on the front page of the Chicago Tribune as the Army's Top Recruiter. He graduated at the head of his military classes, receiving early promotions and top level leadership duties. He was invited to sit at the table of kings, queens, rulers and other dignitaries around the world. In 2005, he ran for city council in Killeen, TX.

Experiencing Vietnam, Korea and other stages of conflict, William received numerous awards, commendations and decorations for his military leadership, some for saving the lives of his fellow soldiers. However, he never wanted recognition for his valor in his many years of combat and on special forces. He was the original leader of the Army's Special Operations Aviation Unit, known as the Night Stalkers. God's Grace allowed William to return safely from numerous special missions despite multiple injuries, surgeries, rods and screws suffered over his many years of service. While in the Army he completed his civilian education through the New York Regions education system, earning a non-thesis Masters in Military Science. After retirement, Will dedicated himself to assisting Veterans in receiving earned benefits they deserved.

A lifetime member of the NAACP, Will served on the Killeen, TX Military Veteran's Panel and was very active with the Youth Committee. He also dutifully served the Washington County Johnson City, TN NAACP wherever needed. He was an avid speed reader, completing several courses at the University of Texas, El Paso, the University of Tennessee and the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy. His love of speed reading was inspired by cousin and educator, "Miss Gillespie" (Callie Redd).

Due to his sister Carolyn's unexpected health crisis in 2001, William returned to Johnson City to assist in her care. He renovated the home to accommodate her every need. Will remained in Johnson City, working diligently to help his

community through the Pro-To-Club, Community Benevolence to feed bereaved families, Carver Recreation Center, tutoring community youth, supporting area churches, youth scholarships and giving of self to meet the needs of family and friends. William revitalized the cleanup, restoration and maintenance of Westlawn Cemetery, doing a lot of the work on his own as well as enlisting the help of others throughout the community. He made everyone feel special regardless of their situation. While he did not condone poor behavior choices, he did not condemn people for their mistakes. In 2015, William's health needs required his return to Texas for his chosen medical care. Despite battling the effects of Agent Orange and other health issues, his response to inquiries about his health was always, "I'm FANTASTIC"!

William was preceded in death by his parents; sisters Kaisa, Pearl, Leah R Trottie, Ida R Butler and Carolyn R Young; brothers James "Skippy" Rhea, Harold and Robert Murray. He leaves to celebrate his life, one brother, Christopher "Lum" Rhea, Jr. (Virginia), brother-in-laws, Clinton Butler and Eugene Trottie, several nieces and nephews, many cousins and a host of dear friends and loved ones.

Many dark corners are brighter, many burdens relieved, many potentials have been realized and many lost souls restored because of CSM William L. Rhea's commitment to God through servant-leadership.

Matthew 25:23 (NKJV) His Lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.'

Homegoing Celebration will begin at 1:00 pm, Monday, April 8, 2019 at New Zion Faith Center, 1904 Jamestown Rd., JC TN. The family will receive friends from 11:00 am until 12:30 pm. At 12:30 pm until the time of the Service, there

will be a “Time of Reflection” from family, friends

Previous Events

Visitation

APR 8. 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM (ET)

New Zion Faith Center
1904 Jamestown Rd
Johnson City, TN 37604

Reflections

APR 8. 12:30 PM - 1:00 PM (ET)

New Zion Faith Center
1904 Jamestown Rd
Johnson City, TN 37604

Service

APR 8. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (ET)

New Zion Faith Center
1904 Jamestown Rd
Johnson City, TN 37604

Tribute Wall

ST

“ I met CSM Rhea as a 19 year soldier right out of AIT. Everybody loved him. The whole brigade. He always shocked everyone when he could recall someone's name after briefly meeting him once. One of my favorite memories is from when HHC all got together to practice softball. Before that first day, I was inconsistent in hitting the ball. After a little coaching, not only could I hit the ball every time, but he taught me how to direct the ball where he told me to. This was almost 30 years ago now. I just learned of his passing. I was honored to have met, worked for, soldiered for, and played ball with. He left a lasting impact on me and I will never forget him.



Sarah Teague - January 01 at 05:47 AM

KC

“ Far and away the best CSM I ever had. I haven't spoken to him in decades but I love him still.

Kevin R. Childs - August 11, 2024 at 05:19 PM



“ William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea

January 29, 2023 at 10:28 PM

PR

“ I met CSM Rhea at the Salvation Army in Killeen Texas, I was alone in the store and he wanted to make a donation, we spoke and then I explained him my situation I was going trough with VA, and he helped me get there, he was a great person, he helped a lot of people in the Killeen-Fort Hood I called him my guardian angel because I was down and almost ready to quit with VA until I talked to him, Rest In Peace Uncle Will, my family and I will always be grateful, I know you watching and like you used to say, “vertical above and breathing” “likewise” #Resteasywill

Pablo Rodriguez - March 31, 2020 at 02:45 PM

RB

“ I am so sad to hear of his passing. CSM Rhea was one of the few CSMs in my 22 year career to have truley cared about his soldiers. One of the best! He will be missed.

SFC(R) Randy Baldonado

Randall Baldonado - November 19, 2019 at 07:13 PM

AR

“ CSM Rhea was a soldier's soldier. He was always there for us. I was his Admin clerk in Fort Hood and even after leaving the military CSM was there helping me with my claims. CSM you are truly missed.

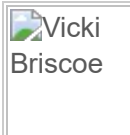
Anne Robertson

Anne Robertson - July 09, 2019 at 12:12 AM



“ *He was there for my family and I during the trying times of our young and immature military life. Because of CSM Rhea, my family and I enjoy life to which he helped guide through his unselfishness and his overall love, caring for everyone he came in contact with. The world lost a truly great and wonderful person and mentor. One of GOD's great ones!!!!*

Richard Westfield - May 25, 2019 at 04:28 AM



“ *Vicki Briscoe lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



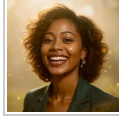
Vicki Briscoe - April 24, 2019 at 04:45 PM



“ *Cheryl Rhea sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Cheryl Rhea - April 11, 2019 at 12:56 PM



On behalf of the Family of CSM (Ret) William Leonard Rhea, THANK YOU for your love, prayer and every kindness shared during our bereavement. Almighty God granted him peace and a well-deserved rest. The Rhea Callahan Family appreciate and celebrate God's gift of William Rhea in our lives! Will led by example. When he could help someone along life's journey, he did. Join us as we honor William's life and legacy of Servant-Leadership. Take advantage of your opportunities to help someone experience Christ at work through you. Give God Glory for His Grace and Favor and Be Blessed! Sincerely, The Family

Cheryl Rhea - April 11, 2019 at 04:31 PM

RR

Cheryl, I've been appointed as the Attorney Ad Litem in the Probate of the estate of CSM (Ret) Rhea in Bell County, Texas. Could you please contact me at 254-699-9999? Thank you, Colonel (Retired) Rick Rousseau, Attorney.

Rick Rousseau - July 01, 2019 at 05:38 PM

WM

“ To the family of Will "Uncle Will" Rhea sending prayers and strength during this time. He was a great man with a heart of gold. Wendy Mazon of DC.



wendy mazon - April 09, 2019 at 04:27 PM



“ William H. Hill Jr. sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



William H. Hill Jr. - April 09, 2019 at 09:53 AM

AF

“ Arthur & Inez Faison lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Arthur & Inez Faison - April 08, 2019 at 11:55 AM

TS

“ Our sincere condolences to the family and friends of a true American patriot. May he rest in eternal peace.

Tim & Eadie Streb - April 08, 2019 at 11:50 AM



“ Geno Russaw lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea




Geno Russaw - April 08, 2019 at 11:09 AM

Brenda
Akens
Charles

“ James & Brenda Akens Charles



Brenda Akens Charles - April 08, 2019 at 12:55 AM

 Brenda
Akins
Charles

“ *Brenda Akins Charles sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Brenda Akins Charles - April 08, 2019 at 12:44 AM

DI

“ *Delores Ivery
To The Family Of CSM William Rahea
I would like to send my deepest condolences
in the homegoing of CSM Rahea. CSM
Rahea was truly a blessing to all who knew
him. CSM would donate food to the Killeen, Tx food bank during
Thanksgiving and Christmas he would provide complete meals for
many families. Words cannot express how much of an impact he
made on my life and so many others he crossed paths with. He
gave from his heart and never expected any thing In return.
I will truly miss CSM calling me Mississippi when he knew I was
from North Carolina. CSM Rahea will always be my Knight in
Shinning Armor. CSM you fought a good fight you finished your
course.*



*Delores Ivery
Rock Rock Tx*

Delores Ivery - April 07, 2019 at 11:46 PM

 Mary
Rollins

“ *Condolences to family of Will Rhea from The
Rollins family in our Prayers for Comfort*



Mary Rollins - April 06, 2019 at 11:02 PM

FH

“ Our sincere condolences to the Rhea family. How lucky to have had such a special friend to have touched the lives of so many, always with kindness and humor. I will never forget those chats we had at the El Paso football games. Thanks for sharing your wit and knowledge. CSM Rhea will be greatly missed and will always be remembered. May God's grace and peace be with the family.

Fred & Henrietta Holly

Fred Holly - April 06, 2019 at 10:51 PM

CD

“ On behalf of the Veterans Supporting Veterans Group at One Way Baptist Church Round Rock Texas, we extend our heartfelt condolences to the Rhea family. I first met him when he voluntarily came to our church on a Saturday and assisted more than 20 veterans with information about how to access the VA claims process. He followed up with veterans individually who had specific questions pertaining to them. Mr. Rhea was a man who helped others because he felt like this was his ministry and personal therapeutic calling. He was a very well spoken man and he commanded your attention with his larger than life presences and booming voice. He refused any compensation for his help he only asked that we remember to also help other veteran when we saw or heard of a need. You were in our lives but for a season and we were blessed to have known you and experienced your caring and selfless spirit. Rest in Gods presences, and to the family may you find peace and comfort during your time of grief.

Respectfully,

Brother Cedric R. Dunmore

Cedric Dunmore - April 06, 2019 at 09:21 PM

RF

“ Retired SFC Angela Fairwell-Smith purchased the Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet for the family of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea.



Retired SFC Angela Fairwell-Smith - April 06, 2019 at 04:59 PM

AF

“ My Name is Retired Sergeant First Class Angela Fairwell-Smith. I met will in September 1999 when assigned to Fort Hood, TX, This was a wonderful man. Debbie Williams told me about him and that he would help me when I got to Texas. Well he was all a women ever wanted. We went to church every Sunday, had dinner together and attend church picnic. He was a caring and loving man. I fell in love with him but he was always on the go caring for others. I would see him at the VA when I was there for my appointments and him, he had got some one there for there appointment. I saw him this passed February at the nursing home. I will say I got my last kiss from him there and then God called him home. I am proud of him for he is in the hands of God now and he is resting. He was a Godly faithful man. You will be missed Will.



Angela Fairwell-Smith - April 06, 2019 at 04:41 PM



“ My condolences to the family of William L. Rhea. He will truly be missed, Bro Rhea was so helpful to me and all the brothers that he assisted with getting the VA benefits they deserved. With love,
Dwayne Cotton

Dwayne Cotton - April 06, 2019 at 12:12 PM

PR

“ *Patria Rhea sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Patria Rhea - April 06, 2019 at 09:55 AM

CT

“ *Connie Thompson sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Connie Thompson - April 06, 2019 at 09:45 AM



“ *Sherwood Brame purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea.*



Sherwood Brame - April 05, 2019 at 02:05 PM



“ *CSM Rhea is good man whom I met a couple of years ago. He helped me a lot as a fellow CSM and Soldier. He was dedicated to helping Soldiers and because of his kind heart. He never asked for anything in return. For him, the gift was always to give and not receive. The heavens have received a good person. Rest in peace because you deserve it.*

Sherwood Brame - April 05, 2019 at 01:35 PM

GN

“ CSM.....

General MacArthur said something that applies to you: "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away." You accomplished so much in your life on earth. In the military you climbed the ladder to become a Command Sergeant Major....no easy feat that few attain. In civilian life you accomplished so much by putting the needs and wants of others first, ahead of your own physical condition.

I salute you my friend. You will be missed but not forgotten

George Nichols



George Nichols - April 04, 2019 at 08:27 PM

SA

“ *Sandy.Sylvers@va.gov sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Sandy.Sylvers@va.gov - April 04, 2019 at 03:35 PM

DD

“ *Delores Delaney lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Delores Delaney - April 04, 2019 at 02:49 PM

MJ

“ Will was a great and kind man. He impacted the lives of many people. He will be sorely missed. May he rest in peace. Maureen J Jouett - Killeen, TX

Maureen J Jouett - April 04, 2019 at 12:26 PM



“ Myra Jan Malone lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Myra Jan Malone - April 03, 2019 at 07:17 PM

EG

“ Will, was the finest most professional and knowledgeable CSM I ever knew. I am proud to have served with him and most importantly to have called him my friend. He will be very much missed. CSM (Ret) Ed Ganz

Edward William Ganz - April 03, 2019 at 03:52 PM

LJ

*Remembering a Dear Friend.
Condolences to the Family.*

Lexa Jones - April 04, 2019 at 11:43 AM

LJ

RIP WILL.

Lexa Jones - April 04, 2019 at 12:11 PM

WH

“ Willette Harris lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Willette Harris - April 03, 2019 at 01:45 PM

WH

“ CSM words cannot express how much of an impact on not just my life, but so many others. You gave from your heart freely and love unconditionally. You were my big brother in Christ. Thank you for letting me and my family be a part of your wonder life. Things will surely not be the same without you here. I can still hear you telling me, "I'm peachy. I'm upright, vertical and breathing.", every time asked you how your day was going. You have been a constant in our lives, will forever remain and hold a special place in my heart. I love you Brother Rhea and see you again soon. Now rest well. I pray a prayer of comfort to your family in this time of mourning. If there is anything that they may need, we are here for them always.

Your Sister In Christ,
Sister Willette Harris
Eastlake Baptist Church

Willette Harris - April 03, 2019 at 01:42 PM



“ Linda Workman sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Linda Workman - April 03, 2019 at 11:52 AM

WJ

“ *Wilma Jenkins lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Wilma Jenkins - April 03, 2019 at 10:51 AM

SB

“ *Deepest condolences to the family.*



Shelia Bagwell - April 03, 2019 at 10:42 AM

JB

“ *To the family of Will Rhea please except my condolences may he RIP*



Jackie Briscoe - April 03, 2019 at 10:16 AM

KM

“ *Kayla Malone lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Kayla Malone - April 03, 2019 at 10:09 AM

JC

“ John Collins lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



John Collins - April 03, 2019 at 07:51 AM

JC

Uncle Will was a great man, he has helped so many and was a role model for young black men like me. I knew Mr. Will since I was little he was one to look up too. May he rest

John Collins - April 03, 2019 at 07:53 AM

BL

“ I am deeply saddened by the loss of Will. He was a wonderful man. An extremely loving, kind and caring person who was cherished by everyone who knew him. He will forever be in our memories and hearts. GOD rest him in peace. My Sincere Condolences PM yuh



Brenda Long - April 02, 2019 at 10:11 PM

TC

To the family of my classmate:
Will was a wonderful friend to all . Will will be forever missed.Life is better because of Will.
Rest In Peace dear friend.

Thelma Fields Crawford - April 05, 2019 at 08:34 PM

JL

“ *Julia Anderson/ Letcher lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Julia Anderson/ Letcher - April 02, 2019 at 09:42 PM

TO

“ *Rest in the arms of Jesus, Will-um!
You did His work on Earth with your love and
commitment to His people.
Laughs and great memories that I'll cherish
always.*



Toni - April 02, 2019 at 09:33 PM

DF

“ *Debra F.Williams lit a candle in memory of
William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Debra F.Williams - April 02, 2019 at 09:02 PM

LB

“ *Lynn & Rayetta Bachman lit a candle in
memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Lynn & Rayetta Bachman - April 02, 2019 at 07:27 PM

RO

“ Raymond & Carol Oxendine sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Raymond & Carol Oxendine - April 02, 2019 at 05:36 PM

RO

Sorry for your loss

Raymond & Carol Oxendine - April 02, 2019 at 05:37 PM

CB

“ Carol Bradley lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Carol Bradley - April 02, 2019 at 05:27 PM

MC

“ To my Carnegie family. My heart hurts so much for you. Will was my hero growing up. Not only as a military hero, but of a man, brother, uncle and friend. May the peace of God cover you all. Know that our Mt. Zion family will be praying for you. Much love, Dr. Melvin T Conley.



Melvin Conley - April 02, 2019 at 04:05 PM

RN

“ Praying for the families and sorry for the passing

REV RICKY AN PEGGY NOBLETON - April 02, 2019 at 02:46 PM

AW

“ Audrey Williams



Audrey Williams - April 02, 2019 at 11:31 AM

RH

“ ROBERT HALL lit a candle in memory of
William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



ROBERT HALL - April 02, 2019 at 02:53 AM

MD

“ Melvin Drumgoole sent a virtual gift in memory
of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Melvin Drumgoole - April 02, 2019 at 01:07 AM

DM

“ Debra D. McCrary sent a virtual gift in memory
of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Debra D. McCrary - April 02, 2019 at 12:17 AM

PD

“ *Pauline Douglas lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Pauline Douglas - April 01, 2019 at 10:01 PM

TB

“ *Trish Bristol sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Trish Bristol - April 01, 2019 at 09:49 PM

CB

“ *Charles Bufford lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Charles Bufford - April 01, 2019 at 07:24 PM

CB

Going to miss you my friend

Charles Bufford - April 01, 2019 at 07:27 PM

MW

“ I've lost a good friend. His kindness, love and concern will never be forgotten. And he sure looked good in his uniform! ---Mary K Williams



Mary K. Williams - April 01, 2019 at 05:07 PM

NP

“ WILLIAM WAS A GOOD FRIEND OF MY FAMILY. HE WAS A GOOD MAN AND HIS HEART WAS GREAT. WILLIAM WILL BE DEARLY MISSED,, HE EARNED HIS WINGS NOW HE CAN FLY🙏. MAY GOD BLESS AND COMFORT HIS LOVE TO THE FAMILY. NANCY S. POSEY

NANCY AKINS POSEY - April 01, 2019 at 03:35 PM

NP

“ NANCY AKINS POSEY sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



NANCY AKINS POSEY - April 01, 2019 at 03:26 PM

VP

“ Viola Patton sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Viola Patton - April 01, 2019 at 03:13 PM

PB

“ Paul & Vanessa Braxton lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Paul & Vanessa Braxton - April 01, 2019 at 02:46 PM

AN

“ We have lost a great hero. Not only on the battlefield but in this country and in our community. He was an outstanding citizen who made the ultimate sacrifice. He will be deeply missed.



Angelo Newman - April 01, 2019 at 02:20 PM

JW

“ Ja Nice Wells sent a virtual gift in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Ja nice wells - April 01, 2019 at 02:17 PM

SH

“ Sherry lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Sherry - April 01, 2019 at 02:09 PM

CB

“ Chandra Bridwell lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Chandra Bridwell - April 01, 2019 at 01:57 PM

CB

R.I.P uncle Will

Chandra Bridwell - April 01, 2019 at 01:58 PM

EB

“ Elaine Brady lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Elaine Brady - April 01, 2019 at 01:33 PM



“ Claudia Goines lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea



Claudia Goines - April 01, 2019 at 12:19 PM

RB

“ *Roddy Bird lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



Roddy Bird - April 01, 2019 at 11:45 AM

TP

“ *Terry Perkins lit a candle in memory of William L. "Uncle Will" Rhea*



terry perkins - April 01, 2019 at 11:10 AM

TP

“ *Prayer for the family and may Will rest in peace*

terry perkins - April 01, 2019 at 11:09 AM

A(

“ *Uncle Will, was such a loving helping hand. Not only to family but anyone in need. He will truly be missed.*



Amber Terry (Fields) - April 01, 2019 at 08:42 AM

CR

Will has always put others before himself and "walked the talk" modeling what Jesus Christ taught. The community of Johnson City as well as Jonesborough will be better because of his many selfless acts. It is a privilege to be a part of his family.

Clara Faye Hart Rutledge - April 06, 2019 at 07:27 AM