

## Gene Burris



Gene Burris was in the Headquarters Platoon of the 101<sup>st</sup> RRC in 1969-1970.

## Gene Burris Obituary

November 7, 1936 – January 26, 2025

Gene Burris, a man with a sparkle in his eye that lived a life that was as colorful and adventurous as it was filled with service, passed away peacefully on January 26, 2025, at the age of 88 in Rockwall, Texas surrounded by his family and loved ones.

Born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1936 to Mattie and Walter Burris, Gene spent much of his early years in Cairo, Illinois, living what could only be described as a Huck Finn dream. He spent his days exploring the woods, hunting squirrels, swimming in the Mississippi River, and even collecting baby snakes to frighten his sisters and mother. His love for cars began early, sparked by a memorable tale of modifying his high school car with spark plugs in the exhaust so it would shoot fire.

In 1955, Gene enlisted in the United States Army, beginning a military career that would span continents and leave behind a legacy of remarkable stories and service. His first assignment took him to NATO headquarters in Paris, where an unexpected career in racing took off. After often frequenting the Paris Ferrari service depot, he was soon put to work by the mechanics who told him if he was going to loiter, he could work! Before long he was racing a Ferrari

Daytona at the legendary 24 Hours of Le Mans. Though his racing career was cut short by a deployment to Korea, his time with Ferrari remained one of his proudest accomplishments.

Gene's military service took him across the globe, with notable posts in Vietnam, Thailand, Alaska, Ethiopia, and West Germany. He spoke often of a Siberian Husky he had while stationed in the arctic of Alaska. He spoke of his time in Thailand deepening his affection for the country and its people, and he often spoke of retiring there and running a dive shop. In West Berlin, Gene served as Command Sergeant Major, overseeing military intelligence operations during the height of the Cold War and teasing the Russians with a fake radar dish made of a giant aluminum salad bowl.

Among his many awards and citations for bravery and distinction, Gene was honored with the Legion of Merit, a Commission Ribbon with metal pendant, and the Gallantry Cross with Palm. His family affectionately referred to him as "Major Commando" in recognition of his exceptional service and fearless spirit.

Gene met the love of his life, Eleanor "Lee" McClenney in El Paso Texas. They were neighbors and both worked at the military education center at Fort Bliss. They married in 1992 and spent many years together, living a life filled with love and adventure until Lee's passing in 2023.

After retiring from the Army in 1977, Gene began a new chapter in education at Park University's military resident center. Gene had received his Bachelor of Arts in Management from Park and he quickly rose from instructor to Vice President of Extended Learning, dedicating himself to helping soldiers pursue higher education. Gene retired from Park in the late nineties, exceptionally proud of the many lives he had impacted.

Gene and Lee spent time living at Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri, eventually moving to Topeka Kansas as well as various towns in Texas to include El Paso, Corpus Christi and Rockwall. Gene and Lee shared a life full of joy, laughter, and travel. Gene's legendary sense of humor—whether telling stories about his pet anaconda, Charlotte, who followed him around Vietnam, or his fearless attitude toward a snake in a foxhole during a rocket attack—was one of his defining qualities. He was always laughing in the face of danger and spreading joy wherever he went.

Gene's practical wisdom was just as memorable. He often said that anything could be accomplished with a combination of time, money, and sweat. His love for his family, especially his grandsons, Maximilian and Jack, was undeniable. He was deeply proud of them and cherished every moment spent together.

Gene had many hobbies to include flying airplanes, restoring cars, scuba diving from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Thailand, and building models. One of his proudest creations was a giant

remote-controlled Russian missile cruiser, which he piloted at Ascarate Lake in El Paso with his RC boat club.

Gene's survivors include his son Stephen, daughter-in-law Kimberly, and grandsons Maximilian and Jack. His legacy of service, courage, humor, and love will live on in the hearts of those who knew him. He will be deeply missed, but his stories and spirit will never be forgotten. Thank you Papa, we love you!