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[Print Page](#)

Obituary for Lt. Colonel Thomas Robertson Jr.

Lt. Colonel Thomas Alton Robertson Jr. (United States Air Force, Retired), of Benton, originally of Amity, aged 71 years and nine months, a fifth-generation Arkansan, passed away on Jan. 2, 2015, at Baptist Hospital in Little Rock. He was the son of the late and former Mattie Euple Boyd, of Alpine, and Thomas Alton Robertson Sr., also of Alpine. He was born in Alpine on March 30, 1943. He is survived by his father, and the mother who raised him, Betty Robertson; his wife of 52 years, the former Thelma Ruth Pittman, a retired Family & Consumer Science Teacher at Bryant, also originally of Alpine; his son, Christopher, of Benton; his daughter, Holly, and her husband, Randy Bunner, of Fayetteville; and his daughter, Melissa and her husband, Jay Bullard Sr., of Blytheville. He was preceded in death by his mother, Mattie Euple Boyd, and by a son, Michael. He is survived by one brother, Larry Joe Robertson, and his wife, Steva, of Amity. Also surviving are his grandchildren, Brad Bullard of Maumelle, Ryan Bullard Sr. of Blytheville, Annalyssa Tanner and her husband, Carter Tanner, of Bryant, Natascha Bunner of Fayetteville; Jay Bullard Jr. of Conway; Katarina Bunner of Fayetteville; Dylan Bullard of Blytheville; Julia Bullard of Blytheville; and Arrabella Bunner of Fayetteville; as well as by his great-grandchildren, Ryan Bullard Jr., Gabriella Bunner and Kylie Tanner. He had 19 nieces and nephews, and had seven surviving brothers and sisters-in-laws.

Lt. Colonel Robertson graduated from Amity High School in 1961 and then attended the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, where he received a Bachelor of Science in Education in 1965. He was also commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S.A.F. through the four-year Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps (AFROTC) program at the University. He earned a Master's Degree in Educational Systems Management through Chapman College while stationed at Castle A.F.B., California. His professional military education includes Squadron Officer's School, Air Command and Staff College, National Security Management and Air War College.

Lt. Colonel Robertson lived a life of service, to his country and to his community. He was an active member of many organizations: the Daedalians, Military Order of the World Wars, Air Force Association, Military Officers Association of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and the Arkansas Veterans Coalition. He was a Veteran of the War in Vietnam, the Cold War and the First Gulf War. He saw to it that every Veteran's grave in six cemeteries in Clark County were decorated with flags for Memorial Day each year, at his own expense. He was also active in the Alpine Presbyterian Church, where he was an Elder.

He completed Undergraduate Pilot Training at Laredo A.F.B., Texas, in May 1967, and then attended upgrade training as a KC-135 Stratotanker copilot at Castle A.F.B. Lt. Colonel Robertson flew over 100 combat missions over Vietnam from bases in Thailand, Taiwan, Okinawa and Guam in support of Southeast Asia Operation, Young Tiger Task Force.

In September 1967, he was assigned to the 70th Air Refueling Squadron at Little Rock A.F.B. as a KC-135 Stratotanker copilot. In December 1969, he was assigned to the 905th Air Refueling Squadron at Grand Forks A.F.B., North Dakota. During this assignment, he served as a KC-135 Aircraft commander, Instructor Pilot and a Standardization/Evaluation Instructor Pilot.

After completing B-52 Stratofortress Aircraft commander training in July 1972, he was assigned to the 46th Bomb Squadron (Heavy) at Grand Forks. During this assignment, he served as a B-52 Aircraft Commander, B-52 Instructor Pilot and Training Flight Instructor Pilot. In September 1974, he was assigned to the 4017th Combat Crew Training School at Castle A.F.B., California. During his tour at Castle, he served as Wing Flight Simulator Instructor Pilot and Wing Instructor Pilot for the 328th Bomb Squadron (Heavy). In July 1977, he became Wing Flying Safety Officer for the 93rd Bombardment Wing (Heavy), and in April 1979, he became Chief of Safety.

In May 1980, he was assigned to Headquarters Strategic Air Command Inspector General Safety Inspector at Offutt A.F.B., Nebraska. Following this assignment, he was reassigned to Castle A.F.B. for B-52 Aircraft Re-qualification Training.

After completing re-qualification training, Lt. Colonel Robertson was assigned to Blytheville (later Eaker) A.F.B., Arkansas. During his tour at Blytheville, he served as Chief of Standardization Evaluation Division and Chief of Aircrew Training and Support Division for the 97th Bombardment Wing (Heavy). In January 1986, he became the Assistant Deputy Commander for Resource Management. In May 1987, he was appointed the Deputy Commander for Resource Management until May 1989.

Lt. Colonel Robertson was a Command Pilot with more than 5,000 flying hours. His military decorations and awards include the Meritorious Service Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, the Air Medal with six Oak Leaf Clusters, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, the Combat Readiness Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service medal with eight Oak Leaf Clusters, the Air Force Overseas Short Tour Ribbon, the Air Force Longevity Service Award Ribbon with four Oak Leaf Clusters, the Small Arms Marksmanship Ribbon, the Air Force Training Ribbon, the Air Force Achievement Ribbon, the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Device and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

In July 1990, he was selected to the position of Vice-Commander AFROTC Northeast Region, McGuire A.F.B., New Jersey. There he assisted with supervising the AFROTC Programs at 30 colleges and universities and AFJROTC Programs in 58 area high schools. He supervised 8 Air Force Area Recruiting Offices operating in the area.

In July 1992, Lt. Colonel Robertson retired from active duty, completing 26 ½ years of service to his country. He applied for and was selected to be the Senior Aerospace AFJROTC Instructor, Detachment AR-031 at Central High School in Little Rock, where he taught for 14 years. He then built a new unit and taught AFJROTC at Bryant High School for several years before retiring from teaching.

Visitation will be at Ruggles-Wilcox Funeral Home, 517 Clay Street, Arkadelphia, in the Chapel on Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2015, from 6-8 p.m. The funeral, conducted by Brother Johnny McAnally, will be at the First Baptist Church, 218 East Texas Street, Amity, at 2 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 8, 2015. Graveside Services with military honors will be at Alpine (Pea Ridge) Cemetery, Alpine, at about 3:30 p.m., to be followed with refreshments and fellowship at the Alpine Community Center in Alpine.

Online register available at www.ruggleswilcox.com.