



## Merle Keith Burkhart

September 30, 1933 - May 16, 2014

Funeral services for Merle Keith Burkhart will be 2:00 p.m. Tuesday, May 20, 2014, at the Freedom Christian Church with Pastor Mark Kinkle officiating. Interment will be in the Freedom Cemetery under the direction of Marshall Funeral Home. The family will be at the church from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. for a visitation.

Merle Keith Burkhart was born to Vernie Ray Burkhart and Louisa Mae McGee on September 30, 1933 in a farm house in the Quinlan, Oklahoma community. At a young age the family moved to the home 9 miles south of Freedom, Oklahoma. Merle grew up with an older sister, Lavonne, and two younger brothers, Dwight and Alan.

At the age of 7, Merle's mother died in a car accident and later Vernie remarried Nelda Lucille Magee.

Merle attended Golden Belt country school his first 5 years of schooling. He continued his education through high school at the Freedom Public Schools in Freedom, Oklahoma. Merle was very active in the local and state FFA programs.

Merle attended Oklahoma A&M College in Stillwater, Oklahoma during the spring and fall semesters of 1952. His college education was interrupted by his military obligation.

On June 9, 1953, Merle married Ramona Faye Wadkins of Tegarden, Oklahoma. To them, two daughters were born: Teresa Merlene and Rayna Mae.

Merle entered active duty in the U. S. Army on June 15, 1953 and was deployed to Japan and Korea for several months. Upon discharge from active duty, he continued in the Army Reserve until his 8-year obligation was fulfilled. Merle again continued his education at Oklahoma State University and graduated with a Master's Degree in Mechanical Engineering.

After graduation from OSU, Merle worked in the aerospace industry for 10 years: This work included re-entry vehicle environment simulation on warheads with Sandia Corporation in Albuquerque, New Mexico; research on VTOL engines at Boeing Company in Wichita, Kansas and rocket fuel research on the Saturn Booster for the Apollo program in New Orleans, Louisiana.

In 1964, Merle accepted a position with North American Aviation in Tulsa, Oklahoma. This work included testing of ground support equipment for the Apollo Spacecraft Program as well as lead engineer testing and verifying the pyrotechnic separation systems on the command and service modules of the Apollo spacecraft.

In 1967, Merle joined Hesston Corporation, farm equipment manufacturer, in Hesston, Kansas as a design engineer on haying equipment. This employment included field testing of the assigned equipment and many trips to all parts of the United States as well as many foreign countries. He traveled extensively behind the iron curtain during the cold war. He currently holds many patents on farm equipment.

While in Kansas, Merle built a large horse barn and he and Ramona had a large stable with about 70 head of horses.

In 1983, Merle resigned from the corporate world and did consulting work for the remainder of his career as an Energy Engineer. Merle retired in 1996 and moved back to Freedom, Oklahoma where he and Ramona lived at the entrance to the Alabaster Caverns.

In 2012, he and his wife moved to Lawrence, Kansas to be closer to their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. They lived there for the remainder of his life during which he remodeled two houses and he and his

wife lived and worked with their daughter, Rayna, on her 24-acre farm. They celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in Lawrence with their entire family present.

Merle loved to hunt, fish and travel. He was a member of the NRA and took several trips with his brother, Alan, to attend conventions. He actively volunteered in the Freedom community with the Freedom Museum, the Senior Center, and the local food pantry. Most of all, he loved to spend time with his family visiting, playing games, working on projects and sharing stories. Cards and domino games could become quite a contest. Merle loved working on projects of all kinds and frequently made the rounds of family members to work on his "daddy-do" lists.

Merle survived two out-of-hospital cardiac arrests and passed away at KU Medical Center shortly after quadruple bypass surgery. His last words were to his family to assure them of his everlasting love for them.

Merle was preceded in death by his parents, Vernie Ray Burkhart and Louisa Mae McGee Burkhart, his step-mother Nelda Lucille Magee Burkhart, his sister Lavonne Burkhart Carver White Parrot, and a brother Dwight Lowell Burkhart.

He is survived by his wife Ramona Faye Wadkins Burkhart; two daughters and one son-in-law Teresa Merlene Burkhart Ulbrich (Douglas Jay Ulbrich) and Rayna Mae Burkhart; four granddaughters and their spouses Tenessa Jaylene Ulbrich Gambrell (David Peyton Gambrell), Lisa Marie Ulbrich Maxwell (Jacob Andrew Maxwell), Cari Rae Diers Meats (Craig Eric Meats), and Kimberly Christine Diers Tate (Aaron Robert Tate); five great grandchildren Kaylee Renee Ulbrich, Jackson David Gambrell, Dylan Jay Maxwell, Vivian Lee Maxwell, and Caler Eric Meats; two unborn great grandchildren Baby Meats and Baby Tate; and his younger brother, Alan Lynn Burkhart (Lana Sue Burkhart).

Memorial contributions may be made through the funeral home to the Freedom Museum.



# Tribute Wall



“ *Merle Keith Burkhart*

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January 30, 2023 at 03:38 AM