



## Dr. Ralph Lee White

March 23, 1931 - May 2, 2015

Ralph Lee White was born on March 23, 1931 in Madisonville, Tennessee. Being orphaned at the age of five, Ralph grew up during the Great Depression. He credited his survival during this era to the love bestowed by his late Aunt Mary and Uncle Lee, brothers James and Kenneth, the many meaningful childhood relationships made in the small southern town of Sweetwater, TN; and particularly, to his fourth grade teacher, Miss Mattie Mae Lacy. He also credited great opportunities awarded through public education and the GI Bill. Ralph graduated from Sweetwater High School in 1949 and later enrolled at Tennessee Wesleyan University. In 1950, he was called to into active duty to serve in the Korean War and later participated in the first military experiment with the exposure of troops to an atomic bomb detonation.

Upon returning from Korea, he taught as a history teacher and football coach at his high school alma mater before completing his master's degree at Vanderbilt's Peabody College. He completed his Doctorate of Education at the University of Tennessee in 1960.

Ralph and his wife Graciela were married for 57 years and raised four sons: Abe, Tom, Andrew, Patrick, and a daughter, Graciela Lea.

Serving as a college professor, Ralph taught at Furman University, Kansas State University, and the University of Southern Mississippi. From 1967 to

1995, he served at Middle Tennessee State University as the chairman of the Educational Leadership department. Ralph White devoted his professional life promoting the value of American public education and equal opportunity. During the turbulent period of the 1960's, Ralph White hired the first African-American professor at MTSU and the first African-American teacher at MTSU Campus School.

A history scholar, Ralph White shared many personal stories and his love of history with his family--especially the principles of our Founding Fathers. His first three sons were named after Lincoln, Jefferson, and Jackson, respectively. Living and embodying the fundamental belief that "all men are created equal," Ralph White daily modeled the principles of tolerance, respect, and non-judgment.

Ralph Lee White was a selfless man of honesty, integrity, and responsibility, and taught his children to embrace these values. He is deeply loved and cherished by his wife, children, daughters-in-law: Michelle, Beth, and Catherine White, Son-in-law, Kenneth Bryant, and grandchildren: Kyle, Hunter, Shelby, Tori, Andrew, Jackson, Kenny, and Sarita and one great-grandchild, Tatum Snyder.

On Saturday, May 9, 2:00 PM, Military Honors will be held followed by a Celebration of Life Services at Sweetwater Memorial Gardens, 1838 Hwy 11 North, Sweetwater, TN 37874

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Dr. Ralph White Scholarship Fund, Sweetwater High School, 414 S High St., Sweetwater, TN 37874

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

MAY 9. 2:00 PM (ET)

Sweetwater Memory Chapel

P.O. Box 201

1838 Highway 11 North

Sweetwater, TN 37874

(423) 337-7773

<https://www.kykerfuneralhomes.com>

# Tribute Wall

WM

“ I enjoyed the pleasure of working with Dr. White for 14 years and appreciated the responsibilities he trusted me with.. I went on to teach and chair aerospace for 12 years none of which would have been possible without his hiring me in 1969. We were in Arizona when he left us and could not attend his memorial. I will always remember him with a great deal of respect. Wally Maples

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**wallace maples** - May 25, 2015 at 11:38 PM

HB

“ Thinking of your family. So sorry for your loss.  
Helen Beaty



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**Helen Beaty** - May 07, 2015 at 02:21 AM

JH

“ My condolences to the White family. I will always remember Dr. White and his "colorful" language. One time he sent me and Terry Weeks out to do off campus faculty evaluations and we missed a faculty meeting because of it. The next day he called us down to his office and started chewing us out for not being at the meeting. We reminded him that he had sent us out and I thought for a minute he wasn't going to accept our excuse. That was the kind of chair he was. He expected you to do your job and be in two places at once if you could manage it. I only wish there were more folks who valued public education and teacher training like he did. He was a real "educator" in the best sense of the word.

Joel Hausler

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**Joel Hausler** - May 06, 2015 at 11:17 AM

GB

“ *It is with heartfelt sadness that I learned of Dr. Ralph White's passing. I have such fond memories of his leadership as Chair in the Department of Educational Leadership at MTSU. He served as an extraordinary example to all of the faculty assigned to him and was highly respected by his colleagues. I will always treasure the personal and professional support and kindness extended to me throughout his tenure as our leader and I admired him greatly. Dr. White made a huge difference in the quality of my life and for all the others who worked with him. May your rich memories be a source of comfort.*

*We share your personal grief, as we have lost a valued member of the Academy of Higher Education.*

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**Gloria L. Bonner** - May 05, 2015 at 02:56 PM

LS

“ *A great man and a loving father.*

*Lynne Richmond Simmons*

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**Lynne Richmond Simmons** - May 05, 2015 at 09:28 AM