



Joel Gray Jr.

October 21, 1941 - May 27, 2025

Colonel Marvin Joel Gray, Jr., of Prattville, Alabama, died on May 27, 2025 at the age of 83. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Leigh Gray, his children Joel Gray, III (Lisa) of Missouri City, Texas, Chris Gray (Rexene) of Lake Nona, Florida, and Shara Gray Haden of Birmingham as well as his grandchildren, Kathryn Gray, Jackson Haden, and Luke Haden. He also leaves behind two beloved Boston Terriers, Gumball and Buddy the Wonder Dog, who would have followed him anywhere – somewhat because handouts of Hardee’s biscuits or Little Debbie cakes would follow but mostly because dogs just know good people. He was predeceased by his parents, Marvin Joel Gray, Sr. and Martha Gray, and his sister, Linda Gray Forward.

Joel was born in Eutaw, Alabama, on October 21, 1941. After an early childhood spent in Mobile, Alabama, while his father worked as an electrician building ships for the United States Navy during World War II, Joel grew up in Chatom, Alabama, and graduated from Washington County High School in 1960. Joel was co-captain of the football team where he was known for his ability to deliver hits so hard that, even decades later, old opponents told him that they were still seeing stars. Joel attended Auburn University where he met and married Leora (Leigh) Britton. Upon his graduation from Auburn in 1964, Joel was commissioned in the United States Air Force and proudly served his country during the Vietnam War as a navigator in the Strategic Air Command, flying more than 100 combat missions over Southeast Asia in KC-

135's. He left active duty to accommodate the needs of a growing family but continued his service in the Air Force Reserve, retiring as a Colonel in 1994. Once his flying days were over, Joel began a second career as an industrial engineer first for American Can Company in Louisiana and Alabama and, beginning in 1980, for Union Camp Corporation (now International Paper) in Prattville. Joel retired from International Paper after more than two decades and went on to work as a consultant for BE&K Engineering until 2008 when the lure of his grandchildren proved too much to resist. Joel attended First Baptist Church of Prattville for almost 40 years where he was an active member until his health declined in his last years.

The United States Air Force should be credited for the military occupational specialty given to Joel back in 1964 because he was a born navigator. Not only did he have an innate sense of direction both in the air and on land – the latter sometimes frustrating his wife as he hardly ever drove the same route twice – he was gifted with the ability in life to chart a course and stay steady and true to it. The duty of a combat navigator was to support the mission while remaining calm under pressure, and Joel faithfully executed this duty in his daily life as well. With a moral compass fixed on his faith in the Lord, he guided his family with wisdom, supported them with loving generosity, and encouraged them through the battles of life. His later years presented him with much turbulence to overcome, but he never lost sight of the horizon, and we are grateful that he has completed his mission and arrived safely, joyfully, and eternally home.

Funeral services will be held from First Baptist Church of Prattville at noon on Friday, May 30, 2025, with visitation one hour prior to the service. Burial will be at North Oak Grove Church in Millry, Alabama on May 31, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. Honorary pallbearers are Billy Conn Beech, Larry Butler, Billy Gilley, Leon Hardin, Joe Mathis, Roy McAuley, Don Miller, and Harry Taylor. In lieu of flowers, donations to Gideons International in Joel's memory are appreciated.

Cemetery Details

North Oak Grove Cemetery

Millry, AL

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY **30**. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

First Baptist Church
138 S Washington St
Prattville, AL 36067
(334) 365-0606

Service

MAY **30**. 12:00 PM (CT)

First Baptist Church
138 S Washington St
Prattville, AL 36067
(334) 365-0606

Tribute Wall

BW

“ *Thou ghts and prayers to Leora and all the family.*

Billie King Wilkins - May 31, 2025 at 10:37 AM

JL

“ *Joel was a school classmate. Saw him at a luncheon with class of 1961, And others about 2 years ago in Chatom
It was great getting to see him and former school
Mates as I had not seen Joel since 1960 when he graduated, He
certainly accomplished alot in his lifetime.
His Mom use to do my hair as a teenager snd my Senior play. I
knew the family since being from a small town.
My prayers go out to his family, and thank them for his service to
this Country and their sacrifice too.*

Joan Furr Lomax - May 30, 2025 at 10:28 AM

JC

*I got to know Joel at Auburn University. I was fortunate to catch a ride home with him from Auburn to Millry many times for weekend visits.
Prayers and condolences to his family.*

Joe Clarke - May 31, 2025 at 10:16 PM

JL

“ *Joel was a school classmate and as I remember a very good student and. Sjj my ways so polite.
His Mom did my hair in my teenage years and for my Senior Play.
I knew the family , growing up in a small town .
I saw Joel for the first since 1960 at a class luncheon he attended for the class members of 1961. It was very enjoyable getting to see former classmates. Prayer for his family*

Joan Furr Lomax - May 30, 2025 at 10:18 AM



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Joan Furr Lomax - May 30, 2025 at 10:31 AM



“ *Good man and wonderful neighbor. He will truly be missed!* ”

Julianne Hansen - May 29, 2025 at 05:56 PM



“ *Dreams From the Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of Joel Gray Jr..* ”



May 29, 2025 at 12:25 PM



“ *Heavenly Grace Spray was purchased for the family of Joel Gray Jr..* ”



May 28, 2025 at 06:10 PM