



William Alexander De Shields

October 27, 1932 - May 22, 2026

Retired Colonel William Alexander De Shields, 93, of Bellevue, Maryland, passed away peacefully at Talbot Hospice on Friday, May 22, 2026.

Born October 27, 1932, in Bellevue, William was the son of the late John L. De Shields and Cornelia Burke De Shields, and brother of the late Rowena De Shields. His childhood was divided between Bellevue and Easton, Maryland, the birthplace of his father, and Wilmington, Delaware. He was known affectionately as "Bill," or "Buddy."

After briefly attending the Robert Russa Moton School in Talbot County, the family moved to Wilmington. He graduated from Howard High School in Wilmington in 1949, where he joined the high school band playing trombone. He pursued a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration at Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, located in Hampton, Virginia. While at Hampton, William was a member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and was also the first person ever to play trombone in the Hampton University Band. Upon graduation in 1954, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army.

Once he completed basic training at Fort Bliss, Texas, William was assigned to the Army Aviation Liaison Pilot School for Army Military Aviation. During his service, William continued his studies with a Master's degree in Human

Relations from the University of Oklahoma, and also graduated from the Command and General Staff College and the Department of Defense Race Relations Institute.

William met his wife, Effie Mae Burton, on the dance floor and they married in 1955. In January 1957, the couple welcomed their daughter Denise Michelle De Shields, and a few years later in 1959 their son Dennis Michael De Shields.

He served in the Army from 1954 to 1984 with key assignments in Wiesbaden, Germany; White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico; Vietnam; Korea; Fort Sill, Oklahoma; the Republic of China; Fort Meade, Maryland; The Pentagon; Fort Sheridan, Illinois; Fort Gillem, Georgia; and the Defense Logistics Agency in Alexandria, Virginia. In 1971, William was promoted to the rank of Colonel. He retired from active duty in 1984 with 30 years of service to the US Army. During his military career, he received numerous awards and commendations, including the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, Bronze Star Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Army General Staff Badge, and Good Conduct Ribbon.

Although his military career was complete, William was a passionate historian and protector of Black histories being lost due to discrimination or time. In 1987 he founded The Black Military History of America, Inc., located in Baltimore, a nonprofit created to preserve and share the impact of Black service in the military. He also served as a historian who provided extensive lectures and photo exhibits about the Tuskegee Airmen. His preservation work continued in Royal Oak/Bellevue where he fought to protect and preserve Bellevue's African-American maritime heritage and the history of Black excellence within the area.

He continued to serve in many board, trustee, or chairman roles for several prominent historical and military organizations until he fully retired to Bellevue in 2014.

Although retired from service, William continued to travel the world with his wife, Effie, and took trips to Mexico, South Africa, Bermuda, Palestine, Israel, the Far East, Singapore, China, and Norway. They would also take their grandchildren on trips across the continental US, with many visits to the United States Naval Academy and Rehoboth Beach.

William "Buddy/Bill/Dad/PopPop" was known to always have a camera in his hand, and lovingly created numerous photo albums for his friends, family, and for personal record keeping. He will be missed for never having a shortage of personal projects for himself (and others) and his iconic "hee-hee" laugh when he was telling a good joke or pulling someone's leg. Most of all, he will be missed for always having a heart to help others, share what he knew, and provide stern but loving words of wisdom.

William had many friends, a loving family, and a heart to always meet someone new. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Effie Mae De Shields, in 2014, and his daughter, Denise Michelle De Shields, in 2018. He is survived by his son and daughter-in-law, Drs. Dennis and Mary De Shields of Easton; seven granddaughters and two grandsons in Georgia and Maryland; and four great-grandsons and two great-granddaughters.

A memorial service will be held at Fellows, Helfenbein, and Newnam Funeral Home in Easton on Saturday, June 6, 2026. The viewing will take place from 11:00 a.m. to Noon, and the service will begin promptly at Noon.

In lieu of flowers, the family is asking for donations to Talbot Hospice Foundation in Easton, Maryland.

Cemetery Details

Arlington National Cemetery

Arlington, VA

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN 6. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (ET)

Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home
200 S. Harrison Street
EASTON
EASTON, MD 21601

Funeral Service

JUN 6. 12:00 PM (ET)

Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home
200 S. Harrison Street
EASTON
EASTON, MD 21601

Tribute Wall



“ *Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home created a Webcast in memory of William Alexander De Shields*



Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home - June 06 at 10:54 AM

LC

“ *My sympathies to The family.*



Lynn Crouch - June 01 at 12:57 PM

SR

“ *Prays to the family. I did not know Mr. DeShields but I did know his wife, Effie. I used to bowl with her in Annapolis many years ago. She was lovely and often spoke of her husband. May the family find comfort in memories and prayers being lifted for you. — Sue Ridout-Moore*

Sue Ridout-Moore - May 30 at 05:07 PM

EA

“ Eileen De Atley lit a candle in memory of William Alexander De Shields



Eileen De Atley - May 30 at 02:36 PM

EA

“ Col.DeShields was always so kind to our family. Especially to our daughters as they were growing up; always encouraging and supporting them. He was such gift to us and to the world.

Ed and Patricia Allen - May 29 at 02:45 PM

WS

“ The absolutely nicest man. Had the pleasure of knowing him by delivering his mail in Bellvue. Such a huge loss. Condolences to the family. Heaven received a true angel

Wanda Swartz - May 29 at 08:06 AM

MC

“ Mary Baker, LPN @ CLC lit a candle in memory of William Alexander De Shields



Mary Baker, LPN @ CLC - May 27 at 09:34 PM

JD

The DeShields Family from Newark Delaware send our thoughts and prayers to the family in Easton. May God bless his SOUL in Heaven 🙏❤️

John DeShields - May 31 at 10:13 AM