

**Gary D French**, age 78 of Colo, passed away peacefully with family by his side at the Iowa Veterans Home in Marshalltown on Saturday, April 18, 2026.

Gary D French was born on October 9, 1947, in Ames, Iowa. His parents were Kenneth Lee French and Esther Verniece (Apple) French. He was the fifth child and had six siblings. The family lived in Nevada, Iowa, and later moved to Tucson, Arizona, in 1955. Gary attended elementary school there. They returned to Nevada in 1960.

In September 1965 Gary decided to quit high school and enlist in the U.S. Army at age 17. His mom had to sign the permission form. He went to Basic Training at Ft. Leonard Wood, MO, and attended AIT at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. He received training to become a Recovery & Evacuation specialist. He went to Germany where he was a general vehicle repairman and then a wrecker operator. He ran his wrecker up and down the autobahn serving with Company B, 51st Maintenance Battalion. After a year there, he put in his request to go to Vietnam.

After a quick trip home at Christmas time to see his family, he headed to SE Asia. Gary wanted to go into combat, but his MOS was needed, and he continued operating a wrecker. He eventually trained others to operate the wrecker while he picked up manuals and began repairing broken-down bulldozers, receiving a second MOS as an Engineer Equipment Operator. He worked on jungle-clearing equipment, which was covered with Agent Orange. His base was one of many attacks during the Tet Offensive of 1968. In Vietnam, he served with the 185th Battalion in the 29th General Support Group. He lost friends and equipment to the North Vietnamese. He was a 21-year-old sergeant when he got out in 1968. When Gary returned home, his family did not recognize him until they saw the nametag. During his short time in the jungle with Koreans away from his base in LongBinh, he had contracted malaria, and he was down to about 125 pounds. Gary met Joyce Flynn while she was working at the Cyclone Truck Stop in Ames in January 1969, and they were married on January 30, 1970. In August 1972, they agreed he should get his GED and enlist in the Army again. Since his inactive reserve time had expired, he had to go back through Basic Training, again at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. He attended Artillery training at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. In January of 1973, the two headed for Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He worked his way up to sergeant again, attending Non-Commissioned Officer Academy in June 1974. He didn't stay in Artillery very long. They found out about his mechanical and organizational skills, and he was transferred into Engineering Equipment Maintenance, serving in Company A, 548th Engineer Battalion. He was discharged in August 1975. Awards earned: Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal (with four bronze service stars) Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation (with palm), Expert Badge with Automatic Rifle Bar (M-16), and Sharpshooter Badge with Hand Grenade Bar.

Gary and Joyce had two babies (Melissa and Timothy) born while at Fort Bragg. They moved to Colo, Iowa, in January 1976. In August 2002, they adopted Christina. Gary enjoyed seeing the country as an over-the-road truck driver for many companies for over 40 years until his retirement in 2010. He belonged to the Colo United Methodist Church and the American Legion.

He was always ready to get in the car and go anywhere, especially after he got his dream car – a 2014 red Corvette. He and Joyce traveled across the country several times and especially liked seeing national parks. He also liked fishing, playing games, and working on cars. However, his favorite pastime was spending time with family.

Gary was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2017, but he continued enjoying life. He was admitted to the Iowa Veterans Home in Marshalltown in December 2025.

Gary was preceded in death by his parents and his brother Galen. He is survived by his wife Joyce; his children Melissa Opperman (Dale Stahl), Tim French (Jodi), Christina Schultz (Justin); grandchildren Taylor Hall (Nicole), Mason Wild, Ethan Wild (Gabby), Kenneth French, Abbie French, Gary Schultz, Cameron Schultz, Dominic Schultz, and Dakota Schultz, Tyler Stahl (Carissa), Nolan Stahl (Sarah), Trent Stahl (Chloe); siblings Sherril Nichols, Betty Marshall, Marla Barnes (Ron), Karen Clapp, and Lori Hubbard; and too many nieces and nephews to list!

A visitation will be 5 p.m. until 7 p.m. on Friday, June 12, 2026, at Rasmusson-Ryan Funeral Home, 1418 Fawcett Pkwy, in Nevada. A memorial service will be 11 a.m. Saturday, June 13, 2026, at the Colo United Methodist Church 602 4th Street in Colo. Gary will be laid to rest at a later date at the Colo Cemetery in Colo.

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation to the Alzheimer's Association or the American Heart Association or to the Vietnam Veterans of America.