



Clay Bollinger

July 13, 1969 - July 9, 2025

In Loving Memory of Major Herbert Clayton Bollinger Jr., USMC Ret.

Herbert Clayton Bollinger Jr., known affectionately as “Clay,” and by his helicopter pilot call-sign “Sparky,” passed away at his home in Ridgetop, Tennessee, on July 9, 2025, at the age of 55. Born on July 13, 1969 in Nashville, Tennessee, Clay was the beloved son of the late Herbert Clayton Bollinger Sr. and Vivian Helton Bollinger, and the brother of the late LauraLee Killingsworth. He is survived by his wife, Melanie, and his cherished stepsons, Breyden and Hunter.

Clay dedicated 22½ years of distinguished service to the United States Marine Corps, where he served as a helicopter pilot. Following retirement, he went on to forge a remarkable second chapter of service and mentorship. As an Executive and Close Protection Agent, Clay taught personal defense, law enforcement defensive tactics, tactical close combat, and firearms to numerous groups and private students through organizations including Agape Tactical, the Israeli Krav Maga Association, and the United States Judo Association. He was also a certified dual-purpose K-9 handler through Vohne Liche Kennels.

Clay’s passion for teaching martial arts and his unwavering Marine Corps values made him a well-respected figure and beloved friend to many around

the globe. He was a world-class storyteller and “people collector,” with a magnetic presence and endless charm. His blend of sacrifice and genuine love for his people left an indelible mark on all who knew him. Clay’s legacy lives on in the countless lives he shaped, the stories he told, and the values he carried. His spirit, much like his call-sign “Sparky,” will continue to light the way for those who loved him.

All services will be held on Friday, July 25, 2025:

A public service with Military Honors will begin promptly at 1:00 PM at the Middle Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery, located at 7931 McCrory Ln, Nashville, TN 37221.

At 3:30 pm, a Celebration of Life ceremony will be held at the VFW Post 9851, 73 New Shackle Island Rd, Hendersonville, TN 37075.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to K9s for Warriors at <https://donate.k9sforwarriors.org> in Clay’s memory.

Austin & Bell Funeral Home in Springfield is in charge of these arrangements.

AUSTIN & BELL FUNERAL HOME-

509 WALNUT STREET, SPRINGFIELD, TN (615) 384-1000

Cemetery Details

Middle Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery

7931 McCrory Ln
Nashville, TN 37221-5704
(615) 532-2238

Previous Events

Graveside Service

JUL **25**. 1:00 PM - 1:30 PM (CT)

Middle Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery
7931 McCrory Ln
Nashville, TN 37221-5704
(615) 532-2238

Tribute Wall

PH

“ *Pierre Hollis lit a candle in memory of Clay Bollinger*



Pierre Hollis - July 20, 2025 at 07:59 AM

LR

“ *Luis Roberto RIVAS lit a candle in memory of Clay Bollinger*



Luis Roberto RIVAS - July 20, 2025 at 05:54 AM

CW

“ *Married on Clay's third birthday! We loved him and we will miss him always! His Aunt and Uncle, Sherry Helton and Charlie Laudermilk*

carol Wiley - July 16, 2025 at 02:46 PM

DJ

“ *Clay was the spitting image of his father. His dad and my dad were brothers. I am the last of the blood line with the exception of my nephew and great nephew. I used my summers babysitting Laura Lee and Clay and really enjoyed chasing the two of them and learning new adventures. From the time Clay could talk he was tell you he was going to be a Marine. He had a head full of knowledge, same as his dad. I thank Clay for his service to us all. Fly high.*

Debbie Bollinger Jones - July 15, 2025 at 03:57 PM

KG

“ I met Clay at NPS in Monterey. The interior designer and the Cobra pilot. What a pair! We really hit it off and Clay remained my best male friend for 25 years. His passing is a tremendous loss to me and many others. Rest in peace my personal Hero. Karla Gruenewald

Karla Gruenewald - July 14, 2025 at 09:11 PM

LR

I don't know him and you guys doesn't know me. I'm just another veteran with PTSD. I feel your pain but remember he rests in the hands of our Lord. May God in his mercy give you peace. Blessings.

Luis Roberto RIVAS - July 20, 2025 at 05:54 AM