Known for his radiant and joyful smile, Anthony James Johnson passed into the restful arms of our loving Lord Jesus Christ on September 23, 2022 at the age of 57 after a courageous 20 month struggle with stage 4 gastric cancer. Loving parents and Tuskegee University graduates Aaron and Geneva (Nealy) Johnson provided numerous opportunities and laid the foundation of academic excellence at several Air Force bases, most importantly at SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces Europe) Belgium. He graduated from the US Military Academy at West Point with a B.S. in Chemistry in 1987 and was one of 19 cadets authorized to attend medical school. An Alpha Omega Alpha scholar, he earned his medical degree at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda in 1991 and completed an ophthalmology residency at Brooke Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston in 1997 after a flight surgery assignment at Fort Bragg, NC (1992-1994). He completed his fellowship in Cornea and Refractive Surgery at Emory University, Atlanta in 2002 then returned as a staff ophthalmologist to BAMC. In 2003, he was deployed for 13 months at the height of conflict during Operation Iraqi Freedom as the only operating ophthalmologist for the 47th and 28th Combat Support Hospitals. During his time in the combat zone, he performed over 400 surgical procedures. From 2004 to 2011, he was stationed at BAMC and served in the following capacities: cornea and refractive surgeon, residency director, and Chief of Ophthalmology. From 2011-2015, he continued his clinical practice while also starting the Army’s first Eye Trauma and Vision Restoration Research Unit at the ISR (Institute of Surgical Research).  After 32 years of active duty service, he retired as a Colonel in 2015 then returned to BAMC as a civilian GS staff ophthalmologist. Highlights of his career include humanitarian mission trips to Honduras, Panama, Peru, Burkina Faso and Nepal, numerous academic publications, developing two patents, and speaking at national meetings. While he loved performing difficult surgeries, his greatest joys were training ophthalmology residents and being present when they experienced lightbulb moments and honed their skills. Equally gratifying were the smiles of his patients as they regained their vision. He continued to see patients until the peripheral neuropathy effects of chemotherapy resulted in his retirement from his GS position in October 2021.

Along with his exemplary performance of his military duties, Tony was the epitome of family devotion. As big brother to Greg, he was by nature protective and equally fun loving as they developed their brotherly bond with every PCS move during their father’s Air Force career. They pursued and excelled in a wide variety of sports (basketball, football, baseball, track and field) and were natural leaders among their peers. The successes of these incredible brothers started in their mutual respect for each other and their desire to “always bring their A game.”

Marrying his USUHS classmate Rinna Conol in August 1988, they celebrated their 34th wedding anniversary in his final month. She fell in love with his awesome dance moves and how he embraced her Filipino family and culture. Their married life was sprinkled with fun vacations throughout the US, Europe and Asia, romantic dates, and daily affirmations.  His infectious laughter and exuberance for life was the fuel for their happiness. In his 30’s, he took up scuba diving (favorite experience was in the Galapagos) and snowboarding (he was the only adult in a class 8-12 year old beginners). In his 40’s he took up Filipino and Malaysian martial arts after years of  training in Aikido and Krav Maga  in order to “acquire a particular set of skills” to protect his daughters. His enthusiasm for fatherhood led him to fully embrace the world of Barbies, Disney sing-along songs, bedtime stories that included the Chronicles of Narnia, Catholic youth ministry, being the photographer for the Karilagan Philippine Cultural Group, as well as the unofficial jumping coach in track and field. He taught his daughters Amanda and Alexis photography and shared with them his love of movies (and eating popcorn), music, reading, bicycling, martial arts, ballroom dancing, and hiking in national parks. His wide range of interests included his taste in music (soul, R&B, soft rock, old school rap music and classical) as well as his taste in literature (fantasy, science fiction, biography, and spiritual growth). While his interest in action and adventure movies was obvious (Star Wars, Marvel, DC, and martial arts), he equally enjoyed holiday Hallmark movies (even though he could predict the plots and dialogue) and animated Disney movies and musicals.  He savored his food, enjoying the first bite with mindfulness and attention to flavor, texture, and scent - from gourmet restaurant offerings, his perfectly grilled teriyaki ribeye steak, sweet drinks (Texas tea, root beer, HiC, and Frescas from Panama), to the simplicity of saltine crackers with tuna after 5 rigorous days of hiking. The smile of enjoyment on his face and satisfactory sigh told the story.

Accomplishments and awards did not erode his humility. As outstanding as he was in all aspects of his life, he constantly strove to improve himself through meditation, reading articles on health, happiness, love languages and Myers Briggs personality typing. Educator and mentor to many, he encouraged, advised, and inspired not only his ophthalmology residents but anyone seeking to “strive and thrive” from his clinic technicians to the teens in youth ministry. As he reached for new heights of success, he “sent the elevator back down” to help others in their climb. Seeing young people succeed and sharing wisdom gained over the years has been fulfilling. Gregarious by nature, he was generous with his kindness and had an innate interest in everyone around him. His memory for names and faces and the life stories attached to them was phenomenal. He could recognize people even through their pandemic masks and often ran into friends while on vacation in Europe, walking through the airport, or hiking through a forest.  Not only was he charming and magnetic, but also his prolific reading allowed him to engage in meaningful and interesting conversations, especially cars and the latest technology gadgets. His optimistic and ebullient outlook on life started in childhood. According to his mom, “anyone was a potential friend and every house had a toy room.”

When he was given his cancer diagnosis and its grim prognosis, his reaction was first of shock. But rather than mull on the negative, he chose positivity and hope. Upon reflection, he said “you know, I’ve had a blessed life, and I am so grateful to God for that.” Despite his final months of suffering, he never wavered in his love and faith in God. He was grateful for all the prayers said on his behalf, smiled with each card in the mail, letters in his “emotional oxygen” book, video messages he received on his phone, and visits from friends and family. He felt loved.

“But you must keep steady all the time; put up with suffering; do the work of preaching the gospel; fulfill the service asked of you. As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to depart. I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith”

-2 Timothy 4:5-7