

Charles Nelson, Colonel USAF Retired

December 1, 1930 - July 29, 2014



Charles C. Nelson, Colonel USAF Retired, of Austin, Texas, age 83, passed away at 2:09 pm on July 29, 2014 after a long battle with cancer resulting from exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam.

He was born on the Creek Indian Reservation in Oklahoma and delivered by Dr. Star, an American Indian Physician, near Drumright, Oklahoma on Dec. 1, 1930.

He attended grade school in a one-room rural country school in Rice County, Kansas and then graduated from Lyons High school in Lyons Kansas. He earned a bachelor's degree in General Education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Nebraska in 1959, a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Arizona in 1963, and a Master's degree in Management at Webster College in St. Louis, Missouri in 1979.

Charlie was disappointed that he was too young to join the military during WWII. After missing half of his high school senior year because of polio, he joined the USAF at age 16 in 1947 and served until his retirement in June 1983. He served as a TSgt in telecommunications in 1952-1953 during the Korean War, and as a Major in Vietnam in 1971-1972 as a communications advisor to the South Vietnamese Air Force.

Charlie was proud of having served in every grade from private to colonel and especially proud of being selected to attend the prestigious Air Command and Staff College and subsequently the Air War College.

His decorations include the Bronze Star, the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal, and other distinguished service awards. His foreign decorations include the Vietnamese Honor Medal and the Vietnamese Air Service Medal.

Other overseas assignments included Greenland in 1954 and Germany from 1963 to 1966. After 36 years in the Air Force, Charlie retired from the military and worked for the Texas Department of Human Services, in Austin, as a communications engineer and manager until he retired in 1993. His primary duties included contracting for the purchase and installation of telephone systems for some 500 offices after the breakup of the Bell Telephone companies.

Charlie retired to a small ranch in Bastrop County and spent many years raising farm animals as pets for his grandchildren. Although he owned horses, his favorite means of transportation on the ranch was his tractor.

Charlie had a great love for Christ and his church and began teaching religious education in 1964. After retiring, he enrolled in classes at St Edward's University and devoted his life to studying scripture. He taught religious education and scripture classes to high school students and adults in various parishes in the Dioceses of Austin.

Charlie was a voracious reader of scripture, history and mystery. Added to his legacy is the work he and good friend Fred Goertz did (1992 - 1994) rebuilding the Goertz log cabin at Hilbig Park in Rockne, Texas, as well as his continued interest and support in the Rockne Historical Association.

Charlie was preceded in death by his son Chuck, who also died of complications from exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. He is survived by his beloved wife of 64 years, Marian Hilbig Nelson of Austin, Texas; daughter Victoria and husband Bob Palmer of Houston; daughter Robbi and husband James Francovich of Austin; son Bruce Nelson and wife Coleen of Austin, Texas; daughter Sachi and husband Aubrey McAuley of Austin, Texas; 13 grandchildren; 5 great grandchildren; one great-great grandson; and a host of Hilbig family members and dear friends.

Mass of Christian Burial was at the Sacred Heart Church in Rockne, Texas Tuesday, August 5th, 2014, and interment, with full military honors, followed at the Sacred Heart Cemetery.

Contributions in memory of Charles C. Nelson may be made to the Rockne Historical Association, 4065 FM-535, Bastrop, Texas 78602 and to the Smithville Honor Guard, P.O. Box 1716, Bastrop, Texas 78602.