

Retired Air Force Fire Chief's Network  
**QUARTERLY NETWORK NEWS**



*Legendary Pioneers Who Reminisce About  
the Past but Focus on the Future*

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Founded – 1990 by Doug Courchene

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**TAPS**



Chief Walter McNeil with sons, Rob (R) and Rick (L), 1977

Walter and Rob Retired as Chief Master Sergeants and Rick as a Master Sergeant. Walter passed away on June 10, 2007 at age 80, after a valiant battle with cancer. Rob and Rick offered their father's eulogy during the funeral service held at the First Baptist Church of Panama City, Florida on June 13, 2007. Interment followed at the Forest Lawn Memorial Cemetery Chapel of Love Mausoleum with full military honors accorded by the Tyndall AFB Honor Guard. A Masonic rite was administered by members of the Panama City Masonic Lodge and Shaddai Shrine Temple, at the gravesite. Honorary Pallbearers were active and retired Air Force and Navy Fire Fighters. Retired Air Force Fire Chiefs attending were: Bob Barrow, Richard Duncan, Milford Puckett, E.T.Z. Sherrill and James Elston (Chief McNeil's replacement in 1993 at the Naval Coastal Systems Station).

Chief McNeil was born in Butler Springs, Ala., on July 31, 1926. He attended school in Montgomery; Ala. Walter retired from the Air Force in 1977 as a Chief Master Sergeant after 31 years of military service. He was the recipient of the Bronze Star, Air Force Commendation Medal and numerous other awards and medals. Chief McNeil was a veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam. He retired a second time in 1993 after 15 years with civil service as fire chief at the Naval Coastal Systems Station in Panama City. He had served as fire chief at Grand Forks AFB in North Dakota from February 1978 to September 1979, before transferring to NCSC-Panama City. Walter had a total of 47 years in the military Fire Emergency Services. Chief Hoyd Sanders summed up "Walt's" dedication

to the fire service:

*Certainly sad to hear about Chief McNeil. Saw him a few months ago when I was in Panama City. I am sure his passing is a tremendous loss to his family. Great person and a dedicated Fire Fighter. While I was serving as a Fire Chief, he and I had some great conversations concerning leadership within the fire service. During our conversations, he would always challenge me to be better than I was. The one thing, which was of primary importance to him, was Chief Officers in the Fire Service need to take care of the troops. One comment he made to me was "Fire Chiefs, Deputy Fire Chiefs, and Assistant Fire Chiefs don't extinguish fires and rescue folks.... a firefighter with a hose line puts out fires and rescue's people." and he added, "It is up to the fire officers to see that they are trained and have the appropriate tools to do their job." Even though we were not close friends, we shared a brotherhood as Firefighters. Evelyn and I will be praying for his Family to be comforted during this trying time. .... Sandy*

Chief McNeil is survived by his loving wife of 48 years, Hilda, of Panama City; three sons, Mr. Ronald G. McNeil (Debra) of Marietta, Ga., Chief Master Sgt. (retired) Robert G. McNeil (Bobbi) of Anchorage, Alaska, and Master Sgt. (retired) Rick S. McNeil (Debra) of Las Vegas; eight grandchildren, Erin McNeil, Eric McNeil, Clayton McNeil, Jaclyn McNeil, Sirena McNeil, Troy

McNeil, Roweina McNeil and Larissa McNeil; two great-grandchildren, Mitchell McNeil-Smith and Cole McNeil-Smith; and two step granddaughters, Seanna Lovell and Nicole Aikins. Condolence may be made at the website [www.kentforestlawn.com](http://www.kentforestlawn.com). Obituary may be viewed on DoDFIRE Fallen Firefighter website.

Editor's comment: I too enjoyed my frequent visits with Chief McNeil at the Naval Coastal Systems Fire Station in Panama City between 1985 and 1992. I was stationed at HQ AFCEA, Tyndall AFB during this time and had occasion to use the Navy Base, which was located on the opposite side of Panama City, Florida. We had many mutual friends

and business acquaintances. Walt was most definitely one that took care of "his troops first". The Navy awarded him \$1,000 at NCSS for an Outstanding Fire Prevention Program that resulted in no annual fire loss. The money was his to do whatever he wished to with. However, he asked his troops what they would like to have the money used for to improve life in and around the Fire Station. Big screen TV, cooking utensils and plants to beautify the station grounds was put to good use, for all the troops to enjoy. Walter's sons, Rick [rickmcneil@cox.net](mailto:rickmcneil@cox.net) and Rob [mcneil@acsalaska.net](mailto:mcneil@acsalaska.net) may be contacted by email if you have any comments concerning their father.



Camp James E. Rudder Fire Station Dedication in 1985 at Eglin AFB Auxiliary Field 6, US Army Ranger Jungle Training Camp

Fire Station funding and manning was the result of a joint Air Force/Army

agreement to provide Fire and Emergency Services by the host base fire

department. Attending the dedication ceremony, front row seated: CMS Bob Remel; Deputy Chief, Bill Wilson; Chief of Training, Col. Thayer B. Allison; Base Fire Marshal, Col Stan Shanefelt; Army Ranger Training Brigade Commander; Fort Benning; GA, Fort Benning Comptroller (SES), James D. Cooper; Base Fire Chief and CMS Guy J. Wills USAF Retired. Standing: MSG Hank Pankow and MSG (Selectee) Terrell Elliott. Others attending could not be named.

Editor's comment: This was one of my last official acts, in 1984, as the Eglin Fire Chief was to complete the planning of the Host Tenant Support Agreement between Eglin AFB and Fort Benning. Prior, Fire Protection provided by the Army, had been less than adequate. CMS Guy Wills and Col. Thayer Allison were major players for Team Eglin.

### *Stamp Fund Contributors:*



The QNN is privately funded by members' contributions. During the past quarter, there was just one contributor:

Chief Bill Ogletree and his wife; Helen of Orange City, Florida. Bill learned of the QNN and The Retired Air Force Fire Chiefs Group from his good friend Chief Marty Jester, who recently moved nearby. He worked with Marty at Homestead AFB before they both retired in the late 1990s. Bill joined the Air Force in 1954 and was assigned as a FireFighter at an Air Base in North Africa. Donations help defray postage and publishing cost and they are voluntary as no membership fees are

charged. Contact the Editor if more information is needed.

### *Sandy's Travelogue...*



"Recently completed a week long road trip with two of my Grandsons (Andrew-11 and Keleb-14). If you

have grandchildren and have not done something like this, let me tell you it is certainly a rewarding experience. We enjoyed the tour of Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. Wow... What a great place. For those of you that ever served at Ellington AFB you would be proud of the changes that have been made around and on the base area. From Houston we spent four days in San Antonio area. Used the Space Available system for Billeting on Randolph AFB. The Services Squadron can be proud of the service the Billeting Folks provide. The personnel at the front desk could not have been more helpful. My Grandsons have never stayed in base guest quarters and they were quite impressed. Visited with the new Fire Chief and some of the great Firefighters at Randolph. Chief Mark Ledford had just recently arrived and I believe he will do a great job leading the Randolph Firefighters in meeting their mission requirements. The firefighters were motivated and the positive attitude they displayed made me proud to be around them. Spent some time on Lackland AFB and will say the changes made over the years is impressive. My first look at Lackland was 6 July 1960. Quonset huts and wooden two story World War II barracks were predominant on

Lackland. You notice I said, "Barracks" no air conditioning, just gang latrines, large fans at each end of the bays, and steel double bunks. I believe that qualifies them to be called "Barracks." The Dormitories there today are AWESOME. I am proud of our Air Force for improving the living conditions for our new Airmen. They are provided a world-class place to live. They have a quality environment to receive their initial training for entry into the Air Force. The Training Instructors are Top Quality Folks. They care very much about the training the new Airmen receive. We did the tourist thing in San Antonio (River walk, Alamo, etc.) and loved it. Spent time in Austin and College Station visiting the LBJ and George H. W. Bush Libraries. Both are very interesting and if you like history, you would really enjoy these places. Spent time in Dallas at the JFK museum. Quite a historical spot that continues to leave one wondering if we will ever know what really transpired there on that November day. Had an enjoyable visit with a couple retirees who live on Lake Fork Texas.... Chiefs Ted Taipalus and Jim Goodbread. They are having a great time fishing and entertaining folks that drop by... self invited. Got to spend time talking about old times and things we wish we had been able to do better and how proud we are of the new generation of firefighters. Not sure, my Grandsons enjoyed all the reminiscing we did but they did enjoy Ted's hunting dogs and



the lake. During my return, my home in Dothan, Alabama I reflected on the discussions Ted, Jim, and I had and did mental journey down memory lane. What an absolutely great group of people I have had (and still am having) the opportunity to meet and work with in Fire and Emergency Services during my 45 years of fire service. What a blessed person I am to have such an opportunity." Editor's comments: Thanks Sandy, good story. Ted and Jim were at the Pioneer Day activities this past September at Dallas, Texas. Our next Gathering will be in September 2009 during the Worldwide F&ES Conference for DoD personnel. DoD is having their annual get to gather at Atlanta, Georgia in late August. The Retired Fire Chiefs have no planned activities for this year's event.

Chief Doug Courchene has been going through the throws of VA red tape. He can only say, "I have filed a claim and waiting, waiting, waiting. Honestly, I don't expect anything from the VA".

Chiefs Milt Puckett and Sandy Sanchez asked that this be published in the QNN. Hope it helps those with hearing impairment:

**HEARING AID INFORMATION FOR US MILITARY RETIREES:** Our profession, while working through the ranks and advancing to the management level took us too many areas exposing us to various noises. The biggest culprit, the aircraft, with or without ear protection (plugs or ear muffs) we cruised the flightline, when aircraft engines were revved up to reach their highest decibels.

Many of us retired with no hearing problems recorded in our Medical Records. While enjoying our Retired Golden Years, we have developed

selective hearing, think our Television sound control has failed us and/or our companion does not talk loud enough. We contact the Veterans Affairs and if nothing is recorded in our Medical Records, we are told that they cannot do anything for us. That happened to me.

First, I accommodated my lovely wife with hearing aids at a cost of \$3800. Knowing now that she could hear everything I said, I pursued the Veterans Affairs for aids for me. Of course, with no luck.

I scanned through what I had recorded on my memory tape and recalled an item that was published in the 'After Burner'. I discovered it some where in my rat hole for unimportant stuff. I didn't think I would every need any hearing assistance. HA! Wrong!!! The following is a program that the Government has established.

Military Audio logy Association (MAA): Tricare programs do not cover hearing aids for retirees or their family members. However, some military facilities support a Retiree AT Cost Hearing Aid Purchase Program (RACHAPP) or Retiree Hearing Aid Purchase Program (RHAPP) for retired US personnel in need of hearing aids.

The Military Audio logy Association has a web site: <http://www.militaryaudiology.org/links.html> that lists several military facilities that offer RACHAPP/RHAPP programs. Telephone numbers are also provided. For the Air Force - Retiree Hearing Aid Purchase Program (RHAPP) for the Army/Navy - Retiree At Cost Hearing Aid Program (RACHAP) The Government has a contract with Starkey Hearing Manufacturer. They make the Complete In Canal, In the Canal and In

the Ear. For an appointment I called Triwest Tricare. They set me up with Fort Carson in January 2004. I was given a hearing test that I had never had before in a military facility. Results were that I was a hearing aid candidate. Being the vain person that I am, I wanted the smallest aids my hearing loss would permit me to have. I was fitted with the Complete in Canal style at a cost of \$936.58. I was told by the Audiologist at Fort Carson, to buy my aids on the commercial market, I would not have had to pay \$5800. I received my hearing aids in March 2004. I am very pleased with them. Every thing is controlled with a command module, with no knobs to twist. Batteries last a week. I purchase batteries from Walgreen when on sale. I get 24 for \$9.99, cheaper than in the commissary. Now for the good part. I was told that I could have got aids for my wife, also. What a bummer!

Don't be bashful; pursue this effort if you are turned down by Veterans Affairs. We have earned all those benefits getting to the Golden Years; serving in our profession has caused us to develop 'SELECTIVE HEARING'. Yours truly, Sandy Sanchez, [bigfiredog43@msn.com](mailto:bigfiredog43@msn.com)

#### *SICK CALL – PRAYERS URGENTLY NEEDED*



Happy to report that my wife Nan's hip recoveries from fractures on each side are healing, without pain. She will be "on a walker" for several more months; however, that is not slowing her down from going wherever she wants to. My dialysis treatments have helped a number of my medical conditions. Weight loss is the best side effect. My weight is now the

same as when I retired in 1992 from the military. The treatments slow down my traveling plans. Three treatments weekly, four hours for each treatment. I have requested that I be placed on the "Organ Transplant Program". If you know of a donor that could be use, please have them contact me for details [chief.one@cox.net](mailto:chief.one@cox.net).

Many inquiries received about my son-in-law, Andy Bernt (Retired FF) in Tampa [bear61@verizon.net](mailto:bear61@verizon.net) recovery from cancer, which resulted in paralyzing his body from the neck down. His cancer is in remission; however, he requires intense therapy to the lower body. He is in water therapy twice weekly, plus physical therapy daily. He is able to use crutches or a walker and has a wheelchair for mobility. This allows him to work part-time as a Fire Science Instructor for the Hillsborough Community College and St. Joe Medical Center "Life Flight" as a dispatcher. He is a team player for the Devil Ray's Wheelchair Softball Team. The Devil Rays purchased high tech wheelchairs for each player. They are known as the Devil Rays Adult Wheelchair Softball Team a.k.a. "The Long Haul Bombers".

Andy is one of there long hitters. The team puts on exhibitions at Major League Parks throughout the country. Hope you get to see him in your area.

Chief Joe Jarrell [firechief6736@yahoo.com](mailto:firechief6736@yahoo.com) and his wife, Ruth are recovering from surgery at home in Austin, Texas. Ruth's problem is behind her now and she is doing well. Since Joe's Total Knee Replacement, there has been a series of mishaps. Most serious, a fall that injured his lower back, requiring therapy.

Chief Charlie Richardson's wife, Linde had a total knee replacement in May and

is doing much better, now.

Have a Safe and Fun 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Say a prayer for our Servicemen and Servicewomen. Serving in harms way and for our on-duty Firefighters. Send those pictures and stories that you have tucked away to one of the QNN Staff Editors. We can help you make it a great QNN story.

Warmest regards, Bob, Sandy and Charlie.

### *Air Force Fire Protection in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Last year the AF announced that a large number of personnel would be cut and the funds to pay for them would be used to modernize the AF. The number started at 58,000 but was subsequently reduced to about 40,000.

The Air Force Civil Engineer decided that CE would lead the AF in becoming as efficient as it could be. This required a detailed review of the business practices of all CE functions, including fire protection, now called Fire Emergency Services (FES).

A goal to reduce 1,500 firefighter authorizations was established and I was directed to determine the impact of such a reduction. Moreover, I was directed to determine how to distribute the cuts across the AF with the least amount of risk.

I asked the Fire Panel (MAJCOM fire chiefs) to help in this very painful and emotional undertaking. Collectively, we were able to lay in about 1,000 firefighter reductions with some increased risk but without closing any fire stations.

Later, through a series of actions, the final reduction was lowered to 901

authorizations that will be taken off the books before FY09. That's about a 14 percent reduction overall and probably the largest reduction of firefighter authorizations in AF history.

Our most difficult challenge is to accept the level of risk that the AF has determined to be acceptable. Generally, we want to provide the highest level of services possible and don't like limits on our capability. The reality is that there are always limits.

A Concepts of Operations (CONOPS) was developed to provide top cover for fire chiefs. It provides latitude for fire chiefs to allocate resources (manpower and vehicles) according to risk at the base, rather than arbitrary minimum manpower standards and have no risk basis. This CONOPS proved to be the most difficult undertaking in my career...I understand why we didn't have a CONOPS – it was very painful.

The reduction provides many opportunities that I want to take advantage of. Primary among these opportunities is the opportunity to take better care of our firefighters. In my opinion we, we have never placed enough value on our firefighters as a human being with family, kids and personal lives away from the fire station. We have been too willing to deny them off duty time “just in case” there's a major FES event. We need to learn, as stated in the CONOPS, to operate within the limits of available resources. Our firefighters are only “available” for 72-hours a week. Our managers must resist the temptation to increase our firefighters' work hours to compensate for firefighters that are not available to work.

Requiring firefighters to work additional shifts is mostly self inflicted pain that

we, FES managers, have perpetuated. Rarely does a commander demand the firefighters work additional shifts. In fact, most commanders don't even know that we do that to our people. We need to understand that our firefighters deserve time to take care of their family and to have a life away from the fire station. We must become the defender of their time off; not the ones that initiate it. Our firefighters do great work for the AF and they deserve time off to take care of their family or just to have time away from work.

As we studied all the issues surrounding the reduction of firefighters, it became clear that the hours firefighters work is one of the two main reasons first term firefighters don't reenlist. The 72-hour workweek is bad enough, but most firefighters don't work this workweek...they don't get a K-day and have to do all their ancillary training off duty. This simply must stop. Firefighters need to work a maximum of 72-hours. Period. This is in the CONOPS that will be signed out by the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force and we will be expected to live by it. The AF accepts the risk.

The good news is that AF FES will still provide the level of service needed to protect AF people and property. Our firefighters are as well trained and equipped as any firefighters in the world and are more dedicated than most. We may not have as much in reserve for the major events but those events are so rare that the AF decided it couldn't afford to have an army of firefighters “just in case.” It certainly wasn't my decision but when I look at our response statistics which were almost totally absent major events, I must agree with the AF conclusion.

- Donald Warner