

## Memorial Day Remarks

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Distinguished guests, American Legion Post 227 members, fellow residents of Springfield, family members of our fallen heroes, and especially, the family and friends of William Gary Chandler...thank you for attending. Post Chaplin Art Gutzler. thank you for today's heartfelt prayers both here and during the parade.

It is certainly beautiful today with flowers at their peak throughout town. The flowers provide us a reminder that our remembrance is not primarily one of grief for lives lost but in celebration of lives lived, memories and differences made, and legacies left. As though beckoned by nature, spring encourages fond remembrance as it's a season of joy, hope, beauty, and love. Let us remember today all of our nation's sons and daughters who, since the Revolutionary War, took upon the burden of defending our nation and, as a result, gave their lives as a tribute to their devotion.

Today is Captain Chandler's day but its about *all* our fallen too. Our nation has given so many in its short history but for many families across our land, this is their FIRST Memorial Day. Later this year, we'll have been in continuous war for 18 years. For three years now, on this day, I've stood in this very spot and prayed that our nation's most hallowed roster of names wouldn't continue to grow. But it did. By how many since last May I ask? Did we pay attention? Did we focus beyond a passing thought of sadness, perhaps a quick prayer for their souls and their families. 33. 33 died since last Memorial Day. *See* their faces, *speaking* their names, *remember* that they had moms and dads, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, daughters and sons, and dreams of their own. They had long lives ahead of them and memories to make. We must honor them because they raised their hands and *voluntarily* took an oath. "They..." to quote Abigail, "...stood on the wall because someone had to." If we don't remember them on their *first* Memorial Day, when will we?

We don't just remember those killed on the battlefield on this day. We also honor their survivors; those that had to find the resilience to continue. They had to live-on, first in pain and grief, then in loss and sadness. They have to live with the cancelled plans, the memories never made. Like Bonnie, they had to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives and figure out how to live again. Gold star families have a special place in our society. Along with those that died, they too paid the tab for our security, our peace, and our nation's policies whether they personally agreed with them or not. In the words of John Logan shortly after the Civil War, remembrances are also meant to "bind up the wounds of the living."

Bill Chandler's 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Sharon Goeble, later Taylor, said Bill "...infused all of those elements of his life with an unflinching cheerfulness, enthusiasm, and above all, sense of humor. He loved to laugh and did it often. When I think of him, he is always smiling or laughing." His high school friend, Joe Clark characterized Bill as the "living definition of gregarious. ...outgoing, fun and a true friend." Felix Ciarlo, another high school classmate who ran into Bill at Ft. Benning remembers his "trademark beaming smile." Mike Delaney, a friend from Team 88 in Vietnam said Bill was "...a great comrade. Conscientious, smart, curious, and gregarious with a wickedly mordant sense of humor." His bunkmate in Vietnam, Brian Valiton noted that Bill was "enthusiastic and friendly." How after nearly five or six decades do different people have such similar descriptions for someone? Simple. It's because Bill was genuinely all those things.

Living at 46 Longview Drive, Bill's dad died when he was 12. Left alone to raise Bill, his older sister Cherie, younger brother Chris, and little sister Holly, Jayne leveraged her skills as a graphics designer and established her own advertising agency. She taught her kids to be resourceful and to work hard.

Bill attended Sabold elementary, Springfield Junior High, and Springfield High. Target shooting with rifle and pistol was his passion and he was a gifted marksman. He loved animals, always having and appreciating cats and dogs. He liked music and photography.

He enjoyed borrowing his mom's 1963 bright red Ford Galaxie convertible and using it to his advantage. Apparently it made him an irresistible partner to go for a top-down drive with a girl around town.

At her high school baccalaureate and graduation, Kae Malinoski Kalwaic, paired up with Bill who was apparently in high spirits and perhaps a bit unruly, had great times as a result. On her baccalaureate program, she wrote that her rehearsal was a riot. That she had a terrific partner [Bill] who couldn't be serious for a minute. On her commencement program she wrote that she'd always remember the night because she had a blast; that Bill and his friends kept her and her friend Dorothy laughing all evening.

After working on an oil tanker for a couple of years and then trying Millersville State College, he decided he'd rather volunteer for service instead of be drafted. As a result, enlisted in the Army in January 1967. After a year of training, he was minted a second Lieutenant in the Infantry and was assigned to Ft Lewis.

The first weekend of March 1968, a University of Puget Sound sophomore named Bonnie Monk from Edwall, Washington was just returning from shopping for Rod McKuen's new album when she got a call from a friend and fellow student who also worked as a campus phone switchboard operator. Her friend said she had a boy named Bill on the phone who had

three friends and that they were looking for dates for that evening. I'm sure bemused and quite curious, Bonnie found three girlfriends and went on a quadruple blind date with Bill Chandler and his lieutenant buddies from the nearby fort.

While the date didn't lead anywhere for the other six, Bill and Bonnie discovered some chemistry. It wasn't long before they fell in love. In just five months, on August 2, 1968, they married.

A couple months later, after Bill received orders to Vietnam, they drove across the country to Pennsylvania and settled Bonnie in to live with Jayne and 11-year-old Holly.

On the night of December 19, 1968, with Bonnie now several months pregnant, Bill flew from Travis Air Force Base, California on a Boeing 707 with 163 other 'replacements, destined for Vietnam. He wrote a heartfelt letter on that flight where he shared his thoughts with Bonnie. He referred to the conflict as a "war with no end in sight and no gain intended." He wondered to Bonnie, how many on that flight would die, how many would be injured, how many would survive the year. He further spoke about his thoughts and those of the other officers regarding the mantle of leadership they would soon be accepting, "Some wonder about themselves, do they know what to do? They'll be given men over there, will they finish with all that they started out with? When everyone looks to him for the answer, the decision, the plan, will he have the right one, the one that will kill the fewest?"

His concerns were of course warranted as he was given a platoon to lead in the 6th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, located in the Mekong Delta region of South Vietnam. Fate would also answer his wonderings in that letter to what category he would fall. A month after his arrival, the day he was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, Bill received a shrapnel injury to his left arm. The wound, although not life threatening, was serious enough to warrant his evacuation to the Army's general hospital in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Though ultimately not as serious as originally thought, he received orders back to Lewis instead of Vietnam.

Fortunately, he was released from the hospital and recuperating at home with Bonnie when she went into labor and gave birth to Samantha on Feb 16.

Soon, Bonnie, Bill and Samantha headed West to Ft. Lewis. Later, with anticipation of interesting and intellectually stimulating, assignments that didn't involve walking through rice paddies, Bill transferred from Infantry to Military Intelligence.

His branch transfer resulted in his reassignment to the Pentagon where he'd be assigned to Defense Intelligence Agency or DIA. On his way there, he attended MI training for several months in the spring and summer of 1970 at Fort Holabird in Baltimore, Maryland.

The months were good for the Chandlers. Days at the beach and occasional visits to Springfield. After training, they moved to a neighborhood Southeast of DC and Bill began his work at the DIA. Unfortunately, Bill was unhappy there and they did not like the area where they lived. They desired something better, perhaps a tour in Europe.

While he didn't envision a long career in the military, at least for practical reasons, Bill desired to make major. With his first tour cut short by his wound, he believed, probably rightly, that he needed the experience and credit of a full combat tour to be on par, competitively, with his peers. They began considering his volunteering for a second tour. They considered the risk, making the assumption that as an MI officer, he'd no longer be on patrols and, instead, likely serve on a staff relatively safe. Considering all this, with a follow-on assignment to West Germany arranged, Bill asked for orders to Vietnam in hopes to improve life for himself, Bonnie, Samantha, and now, #2 on its way.

With trepidation about Bill's upcoming tour and their pending separation, excitement about their growing family and the adventures they were sure to have in Europe, and with Bonnie and Samantha settled in Spokane close to her parents, Bill departed for Vietnam in January 1972.

Arriving in Vietnam in an environment of rapidly decreasing US forces, Bill was assigned to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, known as MACV. MACV was organized into numbered advisory teams that supported Vietnamese governments at the provincial and district level. The teams had both military and civilian members that advised on military and civil aspects of governance. Again in the Mekong Delta region, Bill was assigned as the intelligence advisor to MACV's Advisory Team 88 in the Kiến Hòa, Provence. The team was led by a civilian named Albert Kotzebue.

A member of the provincial rather than a district team, Bill lived and worked at the Team's HQ in their compound in the city of Bến Tre. In contrast, advisors at the district level, working directly with their Vietnamese counterparts, went everywhere they went – literally at their side. As such, danger for the district advisors was much greater. Fortunately, in late 1971 and early 1972, things were relatively peaceful across Kiến Hòa.

In Bến Tre, Bill became fast friends with many of his fellow officer advisors. Guys like Mike Delaney, Dave Godby, and Ed Blankenhagen – fellow provincial advisors, and some advisors from the districts, like John Haseman. Good men all, they were junior officers like Bill. Guys on their first tour looked up to people like Bill and John that had been there before. For those in Bến Tre, they'd gather with Bill at night and play board games in his quarters. They'd share stories and tell each other about their real lives – their families back home.

Bonnie and Bill shared recorded messages with each other. Bonnie found his deep calming voice soothing as she tended to life in Spokane, raised Samantha, prepared for their next baby's arrival, and generally worried about him.

In May, Bonnie gave birth to another daughter, Abigail. Around Independence Day, Bill was able to get 10 precious days of paternity leave back in Washington to spend with Bonnie, Samantha, and their new baby. Bill hated to return to the war but his mid-tour rest and recuperation, or R&R, leave with Bonnie in Hawaii was right around the corner. The anticipation of that trip, the love for their daughters and each other, and their mutual excitement for the upcoming move to West Germany in February gave them the resilience to say goodbye.

In the early summer, a North Vietnamese Army Regiment invaded Kiến Hòa's Ham Long district. A South Vietnamese Army Division eventually pushed most of it out; however significant enemy forces remained. In August, one such force attacked and cut off the Ham Long village of Tan Loi. The beleaguered city, completely cut-off, held on with just a few local defenders.

On August 11, Ham Long's District Chief, Lieutenant Colonel Son, was compelled to quickly coordinate a relief effort. He desperately needed the tactical air, communication, other support, and confidence that came with a Team 88 advisor; however, none were assigned to his district.

Perhaps because of his infantry background, Bill was sent to Ham Long and was accompanied or was met there by Mr. Kotzebue. Temporary as it was, as the district's new advisor, Bill would, of course, accompany the relief force to the beleaguered Tan Loi.

Mr. Kotzebue captured a priceless image of Bill moments before the movement to Tan Loi. Geared up for combat, you can feel his gaze and see he's accepted the day's turn of events that brought him to Ham Long. With his wedding ring placed on his finger by Bonnie clearly visible, one can only guess at his thoughts that moment.

Two battalions in strength, the relief force led by Lieutenant Colonel Son set-off for Tan Loi in the late afternoon. As the senior advisor, the only advisor, Bill was with the headquarters element, surely with Son himself on the planned 8 km tactical movement to make contact with the besieging enemy at Tan Loi. While the main body moved on the elevated road initially heading northwest from the Ham Long compound, as standard practice, Son would have deployed security on the flanks in the woods and rice paddies. Just slightly over 1 km out of the compound, just after crossing the little Tre Bong bridge, Son's force was ambushed from the cover of trees from its left.

There must have been a terrible cacophony of noise and confusion as Son's force was attacked with intense small arms, mortar, and rocket fire; then returning fire, once oriented, with equal ferocity. At approximately 5:00 P.M., Bonnie's Samantha's, and Abigail's lives were shattered along with an exploding mortar round that instantly killed 24-year-old Bill – husband, father, son, brother, and friend to many.

Bonnie was of course devastated. Her partner and lover was gone. Samantha, just 3 1/2 and Abigail, only 3 months would never know their dad. No adventure in Europe, no growing family, no growing old together.

For Jayne, who had remarried the year prior, the pain was palpable, as it is for most any mother who loses a young son. So too for Cherie, Chris, and Holly. Holly, just 15 at the time, still feels the raw pain.

Death impacts and effects spouses and kids the most though. Bonnie, and little Samantha too in a different way, grieved. Abigail was too young to know yet what she lost. Bonnie lost the future she expected and Samantha and Abigail were denied everything that goes with losing a parent as a child. Nearly five decades later, their sense of loss lingers.

Over time though, Bonnie picked up the pieces and had to begin to live again. In the mid 1970's, she married David Ehlers, also a veteran of Vietnam, and in 1976, she had a third daughter, Meredith Ehlers. Her and David later divorced.

In 1983, Bonnie married Larry Warren, a pastor in the United Methodist Church. With Larry came her two step-kids, John and Anne. Also in 1983, having gone back to school, she earned her undergraduate degree in sociology and religion at Whitworth University in Spokane. She continued with her education, culminating in her earning her Doctor of Ministry at San Francisco Theological Seminary in 2013. After years of pastoring, she retired in 2015 to care for her ailing Larry. Unfortunately, Larry passed away in 2017. Today, Bonnie records her thoughts in her blog, "Honestly Now," and spends time with her kids and grandchildren.

Samantha's and Abigail's lives are dedicated to education. The women that they became, and the families they nurture are Bill's and Bonnie's direct and joint legacy. By extension, Bonnie's career in the United Methodist Church, Merry's birth, life, teaching career, and three children, her marriage to Larry, and her relationship with John, Anne, and their families are also tied to Bill, his desire to have a better life for his family, his commitment as an officer, and his selfless sacrifice on the road to Tan Loi.

In addition to a career educator, always having a passion for the theater, Samantha co-founded The Olympia Family Theater. She currently serves as a teacher at Nova Middle School in Olympia, Washington. She shares her love for theater by directing one show a year at the

Olympia Family Theater in addition to directing the shows at Nova. Samantha is married to Irina Gendelman, a professor at St. Martin's University. Together, they have a foster daughter Leah.

Abigail is in her 24<sup>th</sup> year as an educator and is the principal at Carson Elementary in Puyallup, Washington. Married to Lenissa Grover, she has two sons, Tristan and William. Besides education, their family passions are travel, concerts and watching basketball.

In a way that Bill could never have imagined, the proximity of his bunk to that of teammate Brian Valiton in their living quarters would have a profound effect on his daughter over two decades later. Perhaps more than Abigail, Samantha struggled to come to terms with the circumstances of her dad's death, the risks he took, and the decisions he made that put him back in Vietnam.

Although Brian bunked next to Bill, their jobs did not lend them to spend much time together. Neither seized the opportunity to get especially close to the other.

Not listening to the words out of respect and privacy, Brian would hear Bill most every night after curfew quietly replay the latest cassette he received from home. It was plain to Brian that in the middle of that war, Bonnie's and little Samantha's voices both inspired and comforted him.

The voices of Bonnie and Samantha and the comfort it brought to his long-lost bunkmate came back to Brian in the 1980s. He felt the need to find Bill's daughters and share his memory. It wasn't until the Internet that he was able to finally find and contact her many years later. He allowed her to begin an understanding of her father in ways she previously didn't know. By illustrating his peace through hearing their voices, Brian helped her find her peace.

Let us remember Bill Chandler and all of our nation's fallen heroes not just for the fact that they selflessly died but because of how they lived and what they left behind.

At noon today, our flags will briskly rise to full staff. Like the way Bonnie and our other Gold Star family members had to rise up with resilience in face of grief and sorrow, so does our flag. In the afternoon, her mourning over, she is a symbol of illumination, of perseverance in the face of loss. She remembers her dead but steadfastly rises because of the living.