



Robert Emmett Whelan Jr.

November 27, 1945 - April 23, 2026

Robert Emmett Whelan Jr.
1945-2026

Robert (Bob) Emmett Whelan Jr., Lieutenant Colonel, US Air Force (Ret.), of San Antonio, Texas, entered eternal life on April 23, 2026. He was born in Hastings, Nebraska, on November 27, 1945, to Robert E. Whelan Sr., a US Navy officer, and Janice Whelan, a speech pathologist. As part of a military family, he and his older sister, Sandie, and younger brother, Jeff, lived all over the world. He was an avid outdoorsman and active in Scouts, earning the rank of Eagle Scout, and later serving as an adult Scouter for decades. He also served for two years on staff at Philmont Scout Ranch, which was a highlight of his Scouting years. He graduated from Forrest Sherman High School in Naples, Italy. After high school, he returned stateside to attend Notre Dame University for seminary and later transferred to the University of New Mexico where he earned a bachelor's degree and was active in ROTC. Upon graduation, he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force. Bob loved God, his family, church, Scouts, the Air Force, and cats. He later earned a master's degree in counseling at St. Mary's University (San Antonio, TX).

His Air Force adventures took him all over the world including being stationed in Turkey, Japan, and Korea. He retired from the Air Force after 27 years with

the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. As a lifelong learner, in retirement he completed an MBA (Wayland Baptist University), received his license as a long-term care administrator, and served as an adjunct instructor. He pursued many hobbies such as collecting fountain pens, cameras, Bibles, and rosaries; nature photography; traveling; participating in church ministries; and cooking.

He was especially proud of his two children, Charlie and Claire, and his five grandchildren, who were the lights of his life. He took great pride that his son, Charlie, and eldest grandson, Nicholas, followed in his Scouting footsteps and became Eagle Scouts.

Bob married the love of his life, Cheryl Rawlings Whelan, on July 6, 2002. They relocated to San Antonio in 2009 for Cheryl's job in the U.S. civil service and retired in San Antonio. They enjoyed traveling to Santa Fe and taking Road Scholar trips, actively participating in ministries at St. Luke Catholic Church, and spending time with their grandchildren, family, and friends. He had a lifelong love for cats. During retirement, he enjoyed visiting the shelter and would adopt the oldest cats available to give them a happy senior life.

Bob is preceded in death by his father, Robert Emmett Whelan Sr.; his mother, Janice Felthausen Whelan; and his brother, Jeff Whelan. He is survived by his wife, Cheryl Whelan; son, Charlie Whelan (spouse: Tracey Whelan); daughter, Claire Kowalick; grandchildren, Nicholas Robert Emmett Whelan, Fiona Mei Whelan, Moira Lusetta Whelan, Carter Thomas Kowalick, and Patrick Francis Kowalick; his sister, Sandie DiBiase (spouse Jim DiBiase); stepson, William Rawlings (spouse: Christie Rawlings); step-grandchildren, Jacie Rawlings, Carter Rawlings, Phoebe Rawlings, and Laney Rawlings; niece, Nicole DiBiase; and many cousins.

During the last part of his life, Bob suffered from frontotemporal dementia that

was debilitating both mentally and physically. The family would like to thank Brookdale Medical Center Kingsley, Bloom Hospice, St. Luke Catholic Church, and the Veterans Administration for their continuous care and support. The family also would like to express their appreciation to Bob's best friend and Air Force colleague of nearly 60 years, Bill Grace, who faithfully visited Bob for coffee every Friday during retirement and was a steadfast presence and light to Bob, especially during the last two years of his illness.

A Mass will be held at 10 a.m. (Central) on Monday, May 18, at St. Luke Catholic Church, 4603 Manitou Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78228. Burial with military honors will follow at 11:30 a.m. (Central) at Shelter #3 at Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery, 1520 Harry Wurzbach Road San Antonio, Texas 78209. A reception will be held at the St. Luke Catholic Church Parish Hall following burial. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in Bob's memory to BSA Scouting America (scouting.org), St. Luke Catholic Church (saintlukeparish.com), the USO (give.uso.org), or a charity of your choosing.

Cemetery Details

Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery

1520 Harry Wurzbach Road
San Antonio, TX 78209

Previous Events

Mass of Christian Burial

MAY 18. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Luke Catholic Church
4603 Manitou Drive
San Antonio, TX 78228

Burial

MAY 18. 11:30 AM - 11:50 AM (CT)

Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery
1520 Harry Wurzbach Rd.
San Antonio, TX 78209

Reception

MAY 18. 12:15 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

St. Luke Parish Hall
4603 Manitou Dr.
San Antonio, TX 78228