Richard O. Albert, MD
10 September 1920 – 10 March 1990, 69

Bill Russell (left) and Dr. Richard O. Albert refueling the Cessna 172 airplane Richard flew for discovering new caves in the Sierra de El Abra, Mexico. By Robert W. Mitchell, January 1969.

**Services Tuesday for longtime Alice surgeon**

Alice Echo News, Mon., March 12, 1990, pp. 1-2 [died March 10, 1990]

By Laura Taplin, City Editor

Alice has lost a beloved native son, a man whose lifelong love of life, nature and adventure brought him recognition throughout the nation. Dr. Richard Orvil Albert died early Saturday after a long battle with cancer. He was 69.

Memorial services will be conducted at 11 a.m. Tuesday at Immanuel Lutheran Church, where Albert was a longtime member. In accordance with his wishes, his body has been donated to the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston where he received his medical degree. In lieu of floral remembrances, donations may be made to a favorite charity or scholarship funds at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Texas A&I University, or the University of Texas. Survivors include his wife, Dr. Margaret Land of Alice; his sons, Thomas R. Albert, MD of Del Rio and David C. Albert, DDS of San Antonio; their mother, Catherine Albert of Austin; stepdaughter, Stephanie Land of Austin; stepsons Peter Land of Germany and family and David Land and family of Seattle; and his loyal staff, Eva Hernandez, Irma Vela and Rosa Valdez.

Other survivors include a brother, Oliver Albert of Gonzales; one sister, Olive McGregor of Victoria; a nephew and nieces.

**Born September 10, 1920**, in a little green house on what is now S. Stadium Rd., he grew up on a ranch about three miles southeast of the city. The fourth child of German immigrants Richard A. Cicilie Anna Halamitschek Albert, he
obtained his elementary education at Lara School and graduated as salutatorian of William Adams Senior High School’s Class of 1938.

Albert worked his way through four years at the University of Texas at Austin by washing dishes, making beds and sweeping floors and graduated, cum laude, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in October of 1943. The young scholar went on to attend the University of Texas School of Medicine in Galveston where he graduated as a Doctor of Medicine in February of 1947.

Postgraduate studies included years of internship and residency at Harper Hospital in Detroit, Stevens Clinic Hospital in West Virginia, Methodist Hospital of Dallas and St. Vincent’s Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida and he held licenses to practice both Medicine and Surgery in those states. His quest to become a surgeon was interrupted by two invitations from Uncle Sam. Albert first enlisted in 1942 with a desire to go to sea but, to his dismay, the U.S. Navy felt he would serve better remaining in med school. His studies were again delayed during the Korean War where he rose to the rank of Boatswain’s Mate First Class aboard the attack transport U.S.S. Menard in the Pacific. His meritorious service earned him a trunkload of medals and he remained a member of the Naval Reserve on an inactive duty status for 25 years.

After returning to his hometown, he set up General Surgery offices at 310 N. Wright where he conducted private practice until his death.

Hardly a homebody, Richard Albert’s driving interest in nature, places, people and things compelled him to visit 70 different countries in efforts to help his fellow man.

In 1966, while performing surgical duty at the Hospital du Dr. Albert Schweitzer in Africa, he was jailed on charges of international espionage. After his release by his Communist captors he continued his journey around the world.

Dr. Albert, an expert photographer, lecturer and author, wrote more than 50 privately distributed books. One commercially published volume, *Bac-Si My in the Year of the Dog*, is a detailed account of his Vietnam experiences.

Richard Albert’s was a study in contrasts. In addition to his love of travel, he found time to earn his pilot’s license, was an amateur parachutist, and spent more than 50 years actively involved in the Boy Scouts. In 1974, he was awarded the Silver Beaver award while on the Board of Directors of the Gulf Coast Council of Boy Scouts of America. The Silver Beaver is the highest award a council CAM bestow to volunteer scouters.

After becoming an Eagle Scout in 1939, Albert went on to earn 54 merit badges, the Scouter’s Key and Arrowhead Honor. He served as a Mesquite District commissioner, and at his death, was Merit Badge Counselor and Advisor. He also worked actively to help organize the first Explorer post in Jim Wells County.

Many Scouts and Explorers in the area will long remember expeditions Albert led to Mexico, The Philmont Scout Ranch in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of New Mexico, canoe expeditions to Quetico-Superior Wilderness of Canada and a 125-mile survival hike along the sands of Padre Island from the mouth of the Rio Grande to Corpus Christi. The native Alicean served on the boards of the Brooks-Duval-Jim Wells Counties Medical Society and the American Cancer Society and he was a member of numerous medical societies in Texas and throughout the U.S.
He served as Jim Wells County Health Officer from 1958-1963 and as Chief of Staff and Chief of Surgery at Alice P&S Hospital and was accorded Doctor of the Year in 1985.

Since childhood he had an intense interest in natural history and the out-of-doors and spent many months camping and hiking in the wilderness. He has authored articles on cacti that have been published in journals in the U.S. and abroad. His expertise, skills, knowledge and training in natural history and science education prompted him to organize the Alice Audobon Society in 1956. He was also a member of more than 40 conservation-related organizations. His lifetime of accomplishments earned him recognition in the National Register of Scientific and Technical Personnel of the American Institute of Biological Sciences, Who's Who in the South and Southwest, Outstanding Personalities of the South, International Who's Who, Community Service, Dictionary of International Biographers, Who's Who in Texas Today, Creative and Successful Personalities of the World, Two Thousand Men of Achievement—1972, Men of achievement—1973 and Who’s Who Among Doctors – 1985.

**Notes on Richard O. Albert**

William R. Elliott and Steve Bittinger

Richard O. Albert, MD (September 10, 1920 – March 10, 1990) was a surgeon, naturalist, pilot, caver, adventure traveller, and writer from Alice, Texas. Richard spoke and wrote Spanish fluently. He met his wife, Catherine Perkins Albert, while in the Navy in WWII; her nickname was Perky Wench or Perk. Their sons, Thomas R. Albert, a well-known caver, and David A. Albert, were part of this adventure story.

Richard went caving with Robert W. Mitchell and his associates in search of cavefishes of the genus *Astyanax* in San Luis Potosí and Tamaulipas, México. He piloted a Cessna 172 airplane for 48 hours on many flights in January/February and May/June 1969. They discovered many new caves that were soon explored and mapped, from which cavefishes were collected for science. We have records of 24 significant tasks done by Richard on these trips, including piloting the plane and co-discovering six new fish caves, sótanos del Caballo Moro, Japonés, Matapalma, Palma Seca, Piedras, and Yerbaniz. Richard helped collect cavefishes in some of these caves. He and others also sighted significant new sótanos in the Sierra de Guatemala, Tamaulipas, and in the Sótano de las Golondrinas area near Aquismon, SLP. Richard recounted the January 1969 trip in AMCS Activities Newsletter #29, 2006, and his 2018 account in #41 completes his 1969 story (see bibliography below). Later he made six trips in difficult terrain to find Sótano del Malpais, which he had discovered from the air in 1969, and which he located and explored solo in 1972 (AMCS Activities Newsletter #40, 2017). His only aerial discovery that has not been explored yet is Sótano Verde, north of Chamal, Tamaulipas, which could be yet another significant fish cave!

25.6 hours for the first expedition
22.6 hours for the second expedition [21.4 + 1.2 hours until crash]
48.2 hours total flying for cavefish research, not counting return trip to find plane wreckage]
Richard and Tom Albert (left) and Francis Rose peer into Sótano de Yerbaniz, Sierra de El Abra, San Luis Potosí, Mexico. They had discovered the cave from the air a day or two before. By Robert W. Mitchell, January 1969

Some of Richard’s adventures and achievement are recounted in the following book:

**Excerpt from El Abra Cavers and Scientists [Appendix 3]**

Years, Dates, Caves, and Roles in *Astyanax* Field Work

**Albert, Richard**

1969 1/26/1969 El Abra Region, first pilot who made important cave discoveries
1969 1/26/1969 Sótano de Japonés co-discoverer from airplane
1969 1/26/1969 Sótano de Matapalma co-discoverer from airplane
1969 1/26/1969 Sótano de la Palma Seca co-discoverer from airplane
1969 1/26/1969 Sótano de las Piedras co-discoverer from airplane
1969 1/26/1969 Sótano de Yerbaniz co-discoverer from airplane
1969 1/29/1969 Yerbaniz first surface fish collection, 1st and 2nd levels
1969 1/31/1969 Palma Seca first cavefish collection
1969 1/31/1969 Piedras first cavefish collection
1969 5/1/1969 Sótano del Caballo Moro co-discoverer from airplane
1969 5/25/1969 Cueva Chica collecting
1969 5/27/1969 Sótano del Venadito mapping flight with W.H. Russell to Sierra de la Colmena, Venadito, la Nora (in vain)
1969 5/27/1969 Yerbaniz caught fish at night in Yerbaniz arroyo, Km 489, with Mitchell, Tom Albert et al.
1969 5/28/1969 Bee Cave, airplane pilot, mapping flight with Bill Russell to Bee Cave, Malpais, Gómez Farías, Ocampo, back to Hotel Covadonga
1969 5/31/1969 Cueva de la Curva biology
1969 5/31/1969 Venadito flew airplane for aerial photos of pit by Mitchell, accompanied by Francis Abernethy
1969 5/31/1969 Verde observations of deep pit with Mitchell and Abernethy

**Bibliography of Richard O. Albert’s Cave Articles**


Dr. Albert was an avid botanist. *Echinocereus reichenbachii* var. *albertii*, the Black Lace Cactus, was named for Richard, its discoverer; it is endemic to south Texas.
Notes on the Albert Family

Albert, Richard Orvil (1920-1990), born Alice, TX, of Czech ancestry; surgeon — Source: WWS11 from Czech It Out: Czech American Biography Sourcebook, by Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr.

Catherine Perkins Albert, “Perkie Wench”, Navy nurse and first wife of Dr. Richard O. Albert, died July 31, 2007, in Austin, Texas. She recommended a life’s work that involved helping other people as being the happiest life you could choose. Funeral services were held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, August 4, 2007 at Weed-Corley-Fish Chapel in Austin. Burial was held at 3 p.m. that afternoon at the Perkins Family Cemetery. Obituary and guestbook online at wcfish.com. Arrangements entrusted to Weed-Corley-Fish Funeral Home of Austin.

From The Alcalde, UT Austin Alumni Magazine, January 1967, p. 24

Richard O. Albert, BA '43 with Honors, MD '47, Alice surgeon, had quite an adventurous trip around the world. Dr. Albert collected cactus in the Galapago Islands, performed operations at Dr. Albert Schweitzer's hospital in Gabon and spent two weeks in jail as a suspected imperialist spy in the Congo!

Thomas Russell Albert, MD, Del Rio and Austin, Texas, and younger brother David Allen Albert, DDS, near San Antonio. Their mother was Catherine.