

Gabriela Cavazos
Period 4

Ross Cavazos
Airforce
4 Years

Ross Cavazos

Ross Cavazos was born on April 13th, 1947 in Corcoran, California. He grew up without a father who passed away when he was 8 years old and with 10 siblings, 8 brothers and 2 sisters. Mr. Cavazos attended and graduated from Corcoran High School in 1965, and at the age of 18 in 1966 he was forced to make a choice regarding the military. He was already going to be drafted into the Army, so he decided to enlist in the United States Air Force. He already had friends fighting in the Vietnam War and he wanted a new experience, so this was his opportunity. Mr. Cavazos was first stationed for basic training in San Antonio, Texas at Lackland Air Force Base, which separated him from his family by about 1,407 miles.

Ross Cavazos was stationed at Lackland Air Force Base for only one month. During that month he learned to wash and fold his clothes, make his bed, clean toilets and floors, march properly, and shoot. His time at basic training was cut short due to the demand for pilots and other troops in Vietnam, so he was sent to school at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas for three months where he learned to be a jet mechanic. He learned how to work on and create parts for aircrafts while he took some college classes at a junior college in town. All of the special training was very strange to Ross Cavazos at first, because he had to always obey orders or suffer a punishment for disobeying. "I gave up my life up for 4 years," he said when explaining how he did not have his own independence during his time in the Air Force. After he completed his three months of training and learning to be a jet mechanic, he was ordered to be stationed at Laredo

Air Force Base in Laredo, Texas. At the time, Laredo Air Force Base was frozen, which meant no one could leave the base for battle, because they needed the jet mechanics to work on aircraft for pilots training for combat. “We were like their stepping stones,” Mr. Cavazos said when discussing how he had to prepare planes for the pilots training.

Aside from all the intense training and work, Ross Cavazos managed to find some free time and create everlasting memories. During his free time, he would play fast pitch softball for the military and town and some baseball in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. During his leave time, he would find himself at home with his family back in California. At the age of 19, Mr. Cavazos decided that he needed to settle down and he did just that when he married Sara Valdez on base in Texas. At the age of 20, Ross Cavazos and Sara Cavazos decided to expand their family and their first son, Ross Cavazos Jr., was born on Laredo Air Force Base. When Mr. Cavazos was 22 years old, the Cavazos clan decided to increase again and their second son, Richard Cavazos, was born on the Laredo Air Force Base as well. During his time in the service, he made a lot of friends but it was very hard to stay in touch with most of them, because they were all from the east coast and Mr. Cavazos was able to leave before their service times were up. Out of all of his friends, his most memorable one was Kenny McCombs who baptized and became the godfather of Ross Cavazos Jr. McCombs was a very close friend to Mr. Cavazos during his time in the Air Force, but as time went on, their lives went on separate paths.

Mr. Cavazos’ time in the service was very simple. He never really felt pressured, because it was basic for him, you followed rules given and you did the job asked. He compared his service time to a job multiple times, he said “It was like a regular job, you would get off and go do whatever you wanted too as long as you came back the next day like a normal job.” He

viewed the service as having a positive impact on him and helping him add some new tools to his belt. During his basic training, he earned the Marksmen Ribbon, which was purple and was given when you made 60 bullet shots in a row on a target. Mr. Cavazos went up to three stripes and left the military as a Sergeant, but during his time not everything agreed with him. As his time was coming down to an end he witnessed some discrimination that left a negative impact on him. African Americans in the Air Force felt they were being mistreated and complained about all of the civil rights unfairness going on, so they ended up being promoted faster than others even if they were lazy. Mr. Cavazos felt that it was unfair to work for his promotions and then see people being handed one, so when his service time ended he decided to not re-enlist. He turned down a \$10,000 offer to re-enlist, because he and others did not want to deal with the bias. Ross Cavazos left the Air Force while the Vietnam war was still going on and served a total of four years.

In January of 1970, Ross Cavazos was discharged from the Air Force and a huge weight was lifted off his shoulders. When he and his family returned home, he received no recognition because people did not care for the military troops at the time because of what was going on in Vietnam. "People who serve now are more welcomed now then we were back then." he said when explaining what it was like coming home to all of the hate people were filled with. After returning home, he had to instantly start working to support his family. He got a job at a production plant, and drove a Texaco gasoline truck for 3 years. He ended up attending Riverside Community College to get his AA and then got his degree from California State University of Fullerton. The G.I Bill paid for all of his college, which he compared to the military paying troops back for serving. In 1977, Mr. Cavazos began working for UPS for 30 years and is retired

now. Ross Cavazos feels today that the government shouldn't get involved in foreign affairs, because they only hurt our people and he wishes that the government would provide more help to the men and women who are fighting and risking it all for the United States safety. He looks at his overall service experience as a valuable lesson that taught him how to grow up and learn what truly "fighting for freedom" was all about.