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Period 5

Bill Baltazar
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Bill Baltazar

We thank them for their service. We applaud them for their bravery. We acknowledge their loyalty to our country. However, we often neglect the in depth narratives they have to share regarding their life. Thankfully, in this biography, we will observe the detailed life of Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, Bill Baltazar.

On January 5, 1946, Bill Baltazar was born. Being an only child, he describes his childhood in one word, spoiled. His mother, a waitress, was born in Oklahoma and she was half Irish and half Cherokee Native American. His father, who was working in the fields, was an immigrant from the Philippines. Both were living under the highest education of eighth grade. In other words, neither of his parents went to high school or college.

Born and raised in Stockton, California, Baltazar grew up living on a farm. He enjoyed riding his bicycle for miles, playing baseball, and having the desire to fly someday. His uncle was a World War II veteran. Unlike his parents, he attended high school and college. Baltazar attended Manteca High School in Central Valley, California. After graduating high school, Baltazar went to junior college, majoring in Industrial Technology. After some time, he transferred to California State University, Fresno, where he participated in ROTC. Also, he met his wife, Shirley. They got married in the August of 1969, but, unfortunately, Baltazar was scheduled to leave in October to start his military service that October.

He selected the navigator-Bombardier in B-52 bomber aircraft and later became a staff officer at headquarters, Pentagon, Washington D.C. Baltazar went for training at Mather Air Force Base, Sacramento, California for his initial training as a navigator-Bombardier. Baltazar's rank was a First Lieutenant. Initially, he desired to be a pilot, but he wasn't able to do that because he did not have 20/20 vision, so, instead, he joined the Air Force because he wanted to fly.

While in AFROTC in college, people protested the Vietnam War on college campuses. People would disrespect the ROTC cadets and throw food at them. During the cold war, they trained to launch nuclear weapons across Russia, studied targets, and found alternate places to land. When they were out, they would have to stay in their groups of six because they were always on alert, so that would include bunking together. Most of the time, they wore their flight suits all day so that they were ready if they needed to be. If the Klaxon alarm sounded, then would have less than fifteen minutes to go on the aircraft before take off. To launch the aircraft, two crewmember would have break the tickets and when they ripped them, they would have to match. To this day, there are only about 25 B-52's left. He was the bombardier on the B-52, meaning, he was responsible for dropping bombs he did this whole stationed on Guam and flying twelve hours missions to vietnam he was located in Guam and Thailand.

It was not always work. Aside from his main objective, there was a great deal of pranks. Baltazar describes one prank his friends in the service pulled on him. On a 12 hour mission, the pilot of a plane asked Baltazar if he wanted to fly it. Obviously, Baltazar did not refuse and went for the opportunity. The pilot bet him a case of beer that he could not fly it for a minute. Baltazar had it steady for 45 seconds, until it started to drift left or right. It turns out the pilot was making it the rear gun turret move intentionally causing the aircraft to bank. hilariously, he still bought him the case of beer.

Bill Baltazar was involved in two wars, Vietnam and the Cold War. When he came back from the Vietnam War, none of the soldiers got the ideal “welcome home” happy and joyful experience. There weren’t any “thank you for your service” phrases towards the hard-working soldiers. There were people throwing tomatoes at them, disrespecting them, burning the flag, and spitting on them. He describes the unimaginable experience. “It was tough,” Bill Baltazar remarks.

Today, 72 year old, Bill Baltazar, has had a positive impact by his military experience. He retired as a Lieutenant Colonel, receiving many awards. As a result of the GI Bill, Baltazar got to go to college to get his masters degree and teaching credential. He has been a teacher, a principal, vice principal, and school superintendent. Baltazar is still close with his friends who served. Living in a retirement home, he is blessed with a lifetime retirement check and full medical benefits. He enjoys watching soccer in his free time. Baltazar, surprisingly, loves to keep up with the latest technology. One of his most prized hobbies is photography. Sadly, Baltazar suffered from a minor stroke last July, so he was forced to alter his eating habits.

The United States, as a whole, is very fortunate to have veterans similar to Bill Baltazar. If you were to encounter a veteran, and they are willing to share their story, you should take time out of your day to listen and absorb what they are saying. Towards the ending of the interview, we thanked him for his service, but he did not say the casual “you’re welcome”. He looked us in the eye and, genuinely, remarked, “You’re worth it.” That ending statement of his, is one of the many things a person would remember forever.