

Major Malcolm K. Beckner

I was visiting Bill Beckner a few weeks ago and we talked about one of his brothers, Malcolm. Bill was very proud of Malcolm and he shared a lot of information to me about his brother.

I knew Malcolm when we were in high school. I attended Manilla and Malcolm attended Arlington. We both played basketball and I remember playing against him. I am not sure which team won, but I do remember seeing him on the court. We didn't have any other interaction between us during our high school days.

After I graduated from Ball State, I went to work for Arthur Andersen & Co., a public accounting firm. I worked in the Indianapolis office and one day when I looked up from whatever I was doing, I saw Malcolm. We were both working for the same accounting firm. Now we were on the same team. I went up to him and introduced myself. We talked for quite a while and I invited him to dinner with Linda and me. Linda is an excellent cook, so I asked him to come to our house. During our visit that evening, he told me he was going to be a pilot with the Air Force. I was disappointed that we were not going to be able to work together for very long. He was such a great individual and I really enjoyed our visit.

I always enjoyed airplanes and at one time I thought about trying to become a pilot. In fact, I tried to join the Air Force in January of 1962 but was rejected due to feet problems. I remember seeing the big airplanes that Joe Cotton would fly over our house when I was a kid. They always impressed me even though they kind of scared me. Now, Malcolm was going to become a pilot for the Air Force. I thought that would be great for him. I lost contact with him after he left the accounting firm. The next time I heard about him was when he was killed in an airplane accident. That was a real shock to me.

After Malcolm joined the Air Force, he was assigned to flight school at Big Springs, Texas, and graduated. He served as a flight instructor at Laredo, Texas, and then was transferred to Montgomery, Alabama, where he served as a flight instructor for three years. He married Katherine and they had two daughters, Ann and Melissa. Katherine was pregnant at the time of the accident. She later gave birth to their third child. Malcolm was very successful in the Air Force and moved up the ranks to Major.

At the time of the accident, Malcolm was based with the 347th Tactical Fighter Wing in Moody, Georgia. He was involved in a training mission in Canada about 200 miles northeast of Edmonton. He was flying an F4-E fighter jet along with Captain John William Thomas of Springfield, Mass.

Approximately 700 American, British and Canadian armed forces personnel involved in Operation Maple Flag attended a memorial service for the two U.S. Air Force officers near Cold Lake, Alberta. Military services were held in Valdesta, Georgia, before he was returned to Wyatt-Moore Mortuary in Rushville.

Bill talked to me about the events that occurred after Malcolm's death. Even though Bill and Malcolm's parents were still living, Bill was the contact person for the Air Force. This was a very difficult time for the family. Malcolm was only 35 years old at the time. It was decided that he would be buried in Arlington East Hill Cemetery. During the services at Arlington, fighter jets flew over the cemetery and one of the jets shot straight upwards. To Bill's knowledge, this is the only time that kind of service has been performed at our cemetery.

I was visiting with Jerry and Jo Ellen Winkler a few days ago and we starting talking about Malcolm. Jerry was one of the pallbearers for Malcolm. He said when those jets flew over the cemetery and the one jet shot straight upwards, it was very impressive. Jerry and Malcolm were very close friends while they were in high school. Along with many other wonderful memories, Jerry told me he and Malcolm traveled to Mississippi on a fishing trip. Jerry had some relatives there and they went to visit them. He told me they had a great time. Jerry and Jo Ellen both have wonderful memories of Malcolm and his family. They visited Malcolm and his family when Malcolm was stationed at Laredo, Texas. In fact, they still stay in touch with Katherine.

When looking back on the life of Malcolm, I realize how much I take for granted. We have men and women risking their lives every hour of every day in order to keep us safe from all of the dangers that exist in our world. At any time something could go wrong and change the lives of so many people. Malcolm was an exceptional person. I saw him as a very humble human being and yet he was willing to risk his life for others.

We have 363 veterans buried in our cemetery. There is a story behind each one of them. Some died in the line of duty, others were lucky to survive and come home to live within our community. But, each one of them was willing to sacrifice time out of their lives to serve our country. In addition, there are spouses and relatives that had to sacrifice not being able to spend time with these individuals so they could serve our country. I feel honored to have known Malcolm even though it was for a short period of time. He certainly left an impression on me and I am sure on many other individuals. Thank you, Malcolm, for your service and dedication to this great nation, the United States of America.

Information was provided by Bill and Carole Beckner, Jerry and Jo Ellen Winkler, and the Article in the Rushville Republican Newspaper.
The story was written by Larry Martin.