



MG (Ret) Walter H. Baxter, III



A native of Weslaco, Texas, Walter H. Baxter, III was born on July 26, 1926. He attended North Texas Agricultural College, 1943-1944, enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces and in 1946 received an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy, West Point. In 1950, he was

commissioned in the U.S. Air Force. Lieutenant Baxter went through pilot training in Texas, Alabama, and Arizona, then flew fighters in Korea, New Mexico, Virginia, and England. As a Captain, he was assigned as an instructor for the first class of the Air Force Academy. He served in the Air Training Command for a number of years, became a Major, graduated from Air Command and Staff College, and went to Germany as 22d Tactical Fighter Squadron Operations Officer for a year and was Commander for two years.

In 1970, Colonel Baxter graduated from the Army War College and went to Southeast Asia where he was Deputy Commander/Operations and Vice Commander, 8th Tactical Fighter Wing. From there he was assigned as Commander, 64th Pilot Training Wing, Reese AFB, Texas, and as Vice Commander at Keesler Technical Training Center, Mississippi, before returning to Southeast Asia as Commander, 13th Air Force (ADVON). In 1976, General Baxter commanded the 313th Air Division, Okinawa. As a Major General, he moved to command the 24th NORAD Region, comprised of 14 bases and stations located in three northern states and three Canadian provinces. Next, he served in Northern European Command as Air Deputy and Senior American Military Officer on NATO's north flank. His final assignment was Commander, 3rd Air Force, United States Air Forces in Europe, at RAF Mildenhall, England.

His military decorations and awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, **Distinguished Flying Cross with oakleaf cluster**, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal, Joint Services Commendation Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, and the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation. For his service on Okinawa, he was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun by the Japanese.

In 1982, General Baxter retired to Weslaco where he took over the Walter Baxter Seed Company, founded by his father. He is active in both professional and civic affairs including the First United Methodist Church, the Weslaco Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club (Past President), Rio Grande Valley Chamber of Commerce (Past President), American Airpower Heritage Foundation (Trustee), Texas Aviation Board, Mid-Valley Bank Board (Former Chairman), Texas Vegetable Association, American Seed Trade Association, the Rio Grande Valley Agricultural Research and Development Corporation, and the Texas Chamber of Commerce (Vice-Chairman). The General is a Trustee for the Falcon Foundation, an organization to help qualified candidates gain admission to the USAF Academy. He is also the co-founder of Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse. He has recently been named a Marin Military Academy Trustee.

He was recognized for "dedicated service to his country and the many contributions he has made to the City of Weslaco" by the 71st Texas Legislature. In 1993 the Boy Scouts name him Outstanding Citizen of the Rio Grande Valley. In 1995 he received the Texas Vegetable Association Award of Merit for "Leadership and Outstanding Contributions to the Vegetable Industry."

General Baxter has been solidly supported by his wife, the former Lila Waldrop. They are proud of their daughters Maurie DeWitt and Rosemary Baker, sons Bud and Scott Baxter, and

grandchildren Rory Baxter, Julia DeWitt and William Baxter. His hobbies are hunting, fishing, fly-tying, and golf

During his 40 years in uniform he flew 212 combat missions and 4700 hours in 24 types of aircraft. In retirement he has become a respected member of the Texas business community.

Obituary

July 26, 1926 – May 10, 2004

Major General Walter Hope “Buz” Baxter III, who flew 225 combat missions and later served in command assignments throughout the world, died Monday, May 10, 2004. He was 77 years old.

Born July 26, 1926, in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, he graduated from high school in his hometown of Weslaco, Texas, in 1943. He attended what is now the University of Texas at Arlington before enlisting in the Army Air Forces in 1944. After the war, he received an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he graduated in 1950.

General Baxter commanded Air Force units at every organizational level. In 1952, as a lieutenant with the 18th Fighter Group, he served as a flight commander and assistant squadron operations officer and led Mustang attacks deep into North Korea. After his combat duty, Buz transferred to Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, where he wrote many of the plans and procedures for tactical mobility that are still in use today.

In 1954, he married Lila Waldrop of Bessemer, Alabama. He taught at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs during its formative years, from 1958 to 1961. He served two tours of duty in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. He was promoted to brigadier general in 1974 and to major general in 1978.

General Baxter commanded the 13th Air Force advance echelon at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, where he played a significant role in the withdrawal of U.S. forces. He also commanded an air division in Okinawa, Japan; the 24th North American Air Defense Command and 24th Aerospace Defense Command Region in Montana; and served as air deputy with NATO’s Northern European Command in Kolsås, Norway.

In 1982, he ended his 32 years of service as Commander, 3rd Air Force, United States Air Force, Europe, headquartered in Suffolk, England. His many military awards include the **Distinguished Flying Cross with oak leaf cluster** and the Air Medal with nine oak leaf clusters. For his service on Okinawa, he was awarded the Third Order of the Rising Sun by the Japanese government.

After his retirement, General Baxter returned to Weslaco, where he took over and ran his father’s business, the Walter Baxter Seed Company, for thirteen years. During that time, he served his community in many ways, including on the Texas Aviation Board, the Board of Directors of Texas State Bank, the Falcon Foundation at the Air Force Academy, and as a trustee of the Marine Military Academy in Harlingen, Texas. He was named Texas Fruit and Vegetable Association Man of the Year and also served a term as the Association’s president.

Buz also served on the Rio Grande Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Texas Chamber of Commerce, the Texas and American Seed Trade Associations, the Rotary Club, and on committees at the First United Methodist Church in Weslaco. He was a 32nd-degree Mason. In 2001, he received the Distinguished Alumni Award in Military Science from the University of Texas at Arlington.

In 1996, the Baxters moved to Fair Oaks Ranch, Texas. A lifelong Methodist, General Baxter became a Stephen Minister in 1999. His constant smile and friendly disposition reflected his "badge of contentment" for having been privileged to spend three decades wearing the uniform and flying the fighter aircraft of the United States Air Force.

Buz was preceded in death by his parents, Walter Hope Baxter Jr. and Olga Arnold Baxter, and by his nephew, Stephen Barrington Baxter. He is survived by his wife, Lila; daughter Maurie and her husband, Robert DeWitt; son Bud; son Scott and his wife, Betsy; daughter Rosemary and her husband, Clif Baker; grandchildren Rory, Will, Julia, Emma, and Sara; brother Cash; sister-in-law Betty; niece Catherine Eristoff; and cousins Patrice Doerries and George Baxter.

Visitation will be Wednesday, May 12, at Vaughan's Funeral Home of Boerne from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The funeral service will be Thursday, May 13, at 11:00 a.m. at the First United Methodist Church in Boerne, with Rev. Larry Robbins officiating. Burial will be at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

The family suggests memorial contributions to the Boy Scouts of America, c/o Alamo Area Council 583, 2226 NW Military Highway, Suite 119, San Antonio, TX 78213-1850, or VistaCare Hospice, 420 Water Street, Suite 104, Kerrville, TX 78028.

Funeral arrangements are entrusted to Vaughan's Funeral Home of Boerne.

<https://www.holtfh.com/obituary/3101228>