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English 413

Dr. Maxwell

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### Ben Wham: Citadel Man



Born as a War Eagle of Auburn, Alabama, Ben Wham made a conscientious decision to attend The Citadel with an Air Force Scholarship. Colonel Wham jokes, “My folks were teachers at Auburn so I decided that if I stayed I was gonna have ‘em for a class, so I came to The Citadel.” He matriculated in August of 1986 as a member of Golf Company. Although he claimed not to be the smartest bulb in the box, Colonel Wham thrived in the rigorous course load of Citadel Engineering. During a summer of his cadet career, he attended Air Force field training. He reflected on his training with a slight chuckle, “I went to field training, I hate to even say it on film, in Panama City.” However, don’t let the training location fool you: Colonel Wham had his share of

struggles to overcome. While in Panama City, he twisted his ankle, an injury that could have jeopardized his training. Due to the good grace of the Air Force, he was not dropped from the course. Instead, he was forced to crutch through the sandy beaches of Florida. After finishing field training, he returned to The Citadel and finished his degree. After graduation, he applied the values he had learned at The Citadel and commissioned in the U.S. Air Force.

After receiving his commission, Colonel Wham received his first duty station, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. From there, he received duty stations in Spain, Ohio, Colorado Springs, Korea, Hawaii, Washington D.C., Iraq, Idaho, South Carolina, and Afghanistan. As a result of his vast array of duty stations, Colonel Wham acted as an Engineering Commander in both peace and wartime theaters. In the interview, he delves into details regarding the differences between commanding during war and peacetime. Of these differences, he says, "First and foremost is the compression of time. You don't have the time for long drawn-out coordinated decisions: Missions are life dependent." He attributes his ability to think on his feet and make compressed decisions to his time at The Citadel. He explains, "to bring it back to The Citadel side of things, as a freshman you get yelled at a lot, but you are forced into not having a lot of time to make a decision or all the information to make the decision."

As a result of serving in several different command climates, Colonel Wham developed skills with force integration that utilized teamwork to accomplish a common goal. He had the opportunity to work and learn the cultures of other military branches as well as those of the Iraqi and Afghan people. Regarding the citizens of Iraq, Colonel Wham says, "The Iraqis were unique; they were different. They were a good people, who

mean well, and I think that at the basic level they welcomed the Americans and were glad to see them.” However, there are always a few outliers. He shares his biggest worry regarding Iraq: “Will there be enough to sustain them through the life that they’ve got coming up there, or will what we weren’t able to do for them harden their hearts towards us?” This worry alone attests to his character.



Throughout his career in the Air Force, Colonel Wham had a busy schedule, from leading different military engineering units to managing a facility acquisition program for F-22s and F-15s. He has worked diligently in all tasks that he has been assigned. However, his career wasn’t just a job to him. Colonel Wham elaborates, “I love everywhere I’m at because it’s the job I got and I don’t worry about the next one...if you’re worried about the next job, then you’re not focusing on the current one.” Even through the strenuous demand of his work, Colonel Wham found joy in his job. It brought a smile to his face to receive the traditional poundings from his Airmen before

leaving for a new duty station. Also, one of his favorite things in the military is when someone returns from a deployment. With sincerity, he states, “it really is a neat thing to see the look in someone’s eyes when someone comes home.”

After a 27-year career in the United State Air Force, Colonel Wham retired on January 1, 2013. After retiring, he was awarded his third Bronze Star for his service; however, the last Bronze Star didn’t have a retirement statement. By expressing his feelings, Colonel Wham explains why this medal means so much, saying that since there is no retirement statement, “I consider myself still in service to the nation.” As a civilian, Colonel Wham was offered a job by an engineering firm, Davis & Floyd. After around 10 months, he didn’t receive the same level of satisfaction as he did while serving his country. As a result, he left Davis & Floyd in search of a job that would allow him to give back to his community. In August of 2013, Colonel Wham entered the same Lesesne Gate that he did in 1986, but this time as the Associate Vice President for Engineering and Facilities at The Citadel. By accepting this position, he was able to give back to the same institution that had prepared him for his long and successful career in the Air Force.

It was an honor to have met and interviewed Colonel Wham. Because he is a man who has made sacrifices all his life, it amazes me that he is still looking to give back to his community and to his country. Through his devotion and high level of passion, Colonel Wham sets the precedent for what it means to be a Citadel Alumnus and an Air Force Officer.