

Shawkat Harb

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Bravery, Courage, Righteousness: The Life Story of Michael Schmitz

The legacy of Michael Schmitz begins in Wisconsin where he was born. At the age of seven, his family had moved to Texas, providing Michael with an opportunity he would cherish forever. In his earlier years of his youth, he had displayed himself as a “bad kid” towards his classmates and superiors. As a result of this behavior, he was forced to work on a ranch, a ranch owned by Native Americans, in which he developed an affection of animals under the teachings of the natives, and no longer regretted the punishment he was given.

Prior to entering the U.S. military, at the age of seventeen, Michael had gotten engaged with his sweetheart during the 11th grade of high school, leading to his future resignation from school. However, he did not allow this to prevent him from joining the military, a passion he had been surrounded with his entire life. Michael’s family has a very long history of defending our country; his grandfather being a World War I veteran and his uncles fighting during World War II. Flying had been a dream that Michael wished to tackle, due to his love of airplanes, yet he was cast to be a radar controller, a job he still enjoyed. He had spent 25 years of his life working as a radar operation specialist for the U.S. Air Force, monitoring the skies for enemy aircrafts. In addition, Schmitz also had to make sure all aircrafts were separated, provide assistants to necessary aircrafts, and even vector an aircraft to rescue someone in need of aid. During his time in the military, Schmitz had later been promoted to the manager of nuclear weapons, a job that required him to physically count every weapon, to make sure they were all accounted for, along with also working in missile detection. Despite being successful without graduating from high

school, Schmitz had stated that he did not “regret joining the U.S. Air Force,” but did “regret dropping out of school”.

Michael would spend a lot of these days working as a radar controller during the Vietnam War, where he was sent to remote designated locations, such as Pleiku and Da Nang, as well as Nakhon Phanom in Thailand. Although, one of the harshest enemies that Schmitz claimed to have encountered was Mother Nature herself. Due to the abundance of wildlife in the Southeast Asia region, animals, such as rats, snakes, mosquitos, and monkeys, would constantly pester troops and destroy equipment. One of the most annoying aspects about this situation was that Michael and his allies could never prepare for the worst, since these annoyances would appear in some of the most unexpected places. However, these did not lead to entirely unpleasant memories of the war.

When stationed in Thailand, Schmitz had described encountering a massive iguana, a species that the Thai prominently devoured. While one was atop a tree, avoiding its predators that were trying to shoot it, Schmitz had lured it down due to his appealing snack he was eating, pretzels. Schmitz had shortly befriended the unlikely pet and allowed it to live with him and his allies throughout the rest of their mission. Schmitz described the company of the iguana as extremely “helpful”, because of its appetite for mosquitos and other insects that would trouble the airmen. In addition to this experience, Schmitz had also participated in a fight with a Loatian rock ape, in which they both lobbed rocks at each other, which could have resulted terribly, possibly the loss of his life.

While away on this journey, learning new information and making memorable encounters, Schmitz had never forgotten his duty as an Air Force radar operator, and most importantly, his responsibility as a husband and father. While assigned to Labrador, Canada, he

was only permitted to verbally communicating with his family once a week, every Friday evening. Shortly after leaving for this assignment, Schmitz's wife had given birth to a baby girl, and saw her eleven months after her birth. This may as well have been one of the toughest experiences Schmitz had ever encountered, meeting her daughter for the first time, despite her perspective of Schmitz as resembling that of a complete stranger. Although the bond between him and his strong wife was indestructible. When notified of an assignment to a different land for "temporary duty", even though he wished to spend time with his loved ones, he would phone his wife about the news and she would reply with three words, "hot or cold". She did so to determine the type of weather that Schmitz would encounter, in order to pack him the appropriate clothes, something she did constantly when Schmitz was transferred to a new location that she, and their children, could not follow. In his twenty-five years of service, he was transferred fourteen times.

Despite being separated from his family constantly, Schmitz had bandaged this wound through the discovery of a new family, his fellow airmen and marines within the United States military. He described the environment as "close-knit", and that there was "always someone looking out for you". As a result, this strong bond made the loss of those that were close to one another much more mournful, and the introduction of new members to a group a very unsatisfying scene. Since the former recruits had understood the rules and ways of life that the airmen followed, the introduction of new recruits was very irritable, because they were unaware of the environment and responsibilities they had to uphold. Schmitz had gone so far as to say that soldiers would sometimes be more fearful of the "guys around them instead of the enemy" since the level of trust between each other was very low. However, Schmitz admires the servicemen

and women that are currently in service, because they are “more dedicated” to their duties as a U.S. soldier.

Michael Schmitz has obviously proven to be a significant character in the ongoing battle to ensure the protection of this great country we call home. While maintaining a stable and strong relationship with his family at home, Schmitz had also acquired a high reputation among the Air Force, becoming the first enlisted controller to win a weapons competition. Despite the horrors and atrocities that are always accompanied with war time, Schmitz serves as a proud figure of the perseverance and fellowship that should embody a serviceman, father, and husband throughout the remainder of their life.