



*Chaplain Blank as a young airman with the 390th Tactical Fighter Squadron ( left) Sp4c. Michael John Fitzmaurice on the occasion of his receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor (right)*

On that day the claxon sounded and we scrambled to our F-4 Phantoms loaded with 20 MM high explosive rounds, napalm, and Mk 82 500-lb snake-eye retarded free fall bombs. On the ground near Khe Sanh the North Vietnamese infantry and Viet Cong sappers were trying to overrun an outpost of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. Sp4c. Michael Fitzmaurice observed 3 explosive charges which had been thrown into the bunker by the enemy. Realizing the imminent danger to his comrades, and with complete disregard for his personal safety, he hurled 2 of the charges out of the bunker. He then threw his flak vest and himself over the remaining charge. By this courageous act he absorbed the blast and shielded his fellow-soldiers. Although suffering from serious multiple wounds and partial loss of sight, he charged out of the bunker, and engaged the enemy until his rifle was damaged by the blast of an enemy hand grenade. While in search of another weapon, Sp4c. Fitzmaurice encountered and overcame an enemy sapper in hand-to-hand combat. Having obtained another weapon, he returned to his original fighting position and inflicted additional casualties on the attacking enemy. Although seriously wounded, Sp4c. Fitzmaurice refused to be medically evacuated, preferring to remain at his post. Meanwhile, we were dropping our ordnance on the enemy. The assault was turned back and Sp4c Fitzmaurice received the Medal of Honor for his actions that day

Fast forward to January 18, 2017. As my wife and I were waiting for our connecting flight to Washington DC for the inauguration events as guests of CSMR CH Omarosa Manigault, who was selected as Assistant to the President and Director of Communications for the White House Office of Public Liaison, a man wearing a Medal of Honor (MOH) Society jacket sat down with his wife directly across from us. I greeted them and asked his connection to the MOH Society and he told me he was a MOH recipient and he gave me his MOH coin. I looked at the coin and was shocked to see the date: March 23, 1971. I remembered that March 1971 was the date that is on my second DFC citation that I received for an attack that we conducted under extremely adverse weather conditions and heavy Quad ZSU 23-4 and ZPU anti-aircraft artillery fire. We were credited with saving that army unit. I thought that saving the outpost of the 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division on March 23 may have been that mission. I thought back to March 1971 and recalled being scrambled for a critical troops-in-contact situation. I recalled the heavy ground fire and how close the Forward Air Controller (FAC) asked us to place our ordnance. Despite the heavy fire we pressed in much lower than a normal bomb pass for more accuracy due to how close we were asked to place our bombs and napalm to the friendly position. We made four bomb passes, a napalm pass, and multiple 20mm strafing runs until we were out of ammunition. We returned to Da Nang and took off again as soon as ordnance was reloaded to return to the fight. When we checked back in with the FAC we were relieved to hear the ground attack had faltered and we were able to place our ordnance on the fleeing enemy forces to prevent them from being able to reassemble for another attack. What a blessing it was after almost 46 years to meet a soldier whose life may have been saved by my focus on that mission and the skill of my aircraft commander and the equal skill and efforts of our wingman.

The adrenalin rush of combat flying was such a thrill that through my 366 Tactical Fighter Wing headquarters job in the flight scheduling shop I was able to load my squadron up with missions for the times that I was in crew rest and available to fly. Thus I got to fly 248 combat missions including those two on March 23, 1971.

I am forever grateful to a loving and gracious God that gave me the first desire of my heart to fly combat and also those ACs over my F-4 years that shared the joy of 35,800 pounds of thrust with me, their patience and their generosity. The same God led me to follow him in service, change my commission from regular to reserve so I could go to seminary, pastor a church, and then recalled me to active duty so I could do the two things I enjoy the most, flying the F-4 and sharing God's amazing love for us. Now he lets me serve our soldiers and airmen, their families, and the families of former soldiers and airmen that have been called to heaven. Thank you CSMR. God is good!

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