“There is no limit to the good you can do if you don’t care who gets the credit.”
- George C. Marshall, USA

Interview with Maj Michael Michel (Ret. USAF)

Major Michael Michel is a retired airman who enlisted into the Air Force and became a pararescueman (PJ). He served in Afghanistan and was awarded the Bronze Star for his actions. He then served in a reserve unit for four years. Michel was awarded an HPSP scholarship and went to medical school. He returned to the service as a surgeon and eventually retired as a Major.

On October 2\textsuperscript{nd}, I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Michel over the phone and ask him a few questions about his incredible career. When asked about what it takes to make it through PJ schoolhouse he said simply “Perseverance.” He always had the mental attitude of “I’m not going to give up.” Of the 11 who graduate from his 112 person class, it wasn’t always the physically strongest guy who made it through. In fact, he recalled seeing some of the strongest men crying in the pool or being unable to run any further. Only those who were the toughest mentally made it out. I asked the Major about his relationship with the HH-60 pilots: “We actually had a very good relationship especially with the helicopter drivers. At the time, our other aircraft was the C-130, and we still had a good relationship with those crews as well, but particularly so with the helicopter pilots. There were times, especially when we were dealing with the younger pilots, where it was difficult to keep the boundary between officer and enlisted because we got along so well. We joked a lot with them. We would say that the pilots would call themselves PJs to pick up girls at the bar. We had a very good relationship.”
His experience in the Air Force was unique, insofar as he served as both an officer and enlisted. Further, he served in two vastly different AFSCs.

I asked him what the transition from PJ to surgeon was like, but his response sort of took me by surprise: “There are a lot of corollaries there which I didn’t realize until after the fact. By far the toughest thing I had ever done was going through PJ school. Medical school was tough for different reasons. I held the concept of ‘I went through PJ school. I can handle this,’ but there were some times where it was a little bit rough. So, I just had to keep falling back on that attitude of ‘I can’t give up.’ Being a surgeon specifically is very similar to being a PJ. There are times where if the mission is going to be accomplished it has to be because of me. I’m it. There’s no backup. There is no one who can take over for me. So, it was nice to have a background that prepared me to be a better surgeon.”

Finally, I asked Dr. Michel what we can be doing as cadets to prepare for future commissioning in the Air Force. He answered, “Educate yourself as to what’s out there. The more prepared you are, the better prepared you are to make the right decision as far as what career path to take, but also to kind of get an idea of what’s expected and if there’s anything specific that you can prepare for. If someone called me today and said ‘Hey! I want to be a CRO in the Air Force,’ I would talk to them about physical training. There’s not a lot you can do to prepare from an educational standpoint. You’ll learn what you need to learn. The biggest factor, which we talked about already, is perseverance. For any career field, talk to somebody that’s been there and get firsthand advice.”

This Week in Det 590

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Edited by C/3C Townson