

Michael Foglio

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It's time to wrap up our December Spotlights! Last but certainly not least, let me introduce Michael Foglio: our current Commander of the American Legion Post 139. After interviewing both Linda and Clint, I'm excited to do this interview to see what new things we learn about our commander!

Michael Foglio, who prefers to go by Mike, was born in Jersey City, NJ on May 18, 1948 (which makes him a Taurus). He was also raised in Jersey City. Mike currently resides here in Lyndhurst, NJ and has since 1982. Mike has been commander of the Barringer-Walker-LoPinto Post 139 since 2016 and has previously served a term as the post's bar chair. Like many of our legionnaires, Mike is a dual member, so not only is he a legionnaire but he is a SAL member as well. In addition to his dual membership with the American Legion, Mike is also a member of two other veteran organizations: the DAV (Disabled American Veterans) and the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars).

At 19, Mike served in the United States Air Force as a crew chief of KC135. He fought in the Vietnam War, serving from September of 1967 to May of 1970. Interestingly enough, I found out that Mike, who is the only person I've met so far, had both enlisted and been drafted. How is that possible you may ask? When Mike signed up and enlisted in the United States Air Force, there was actually a waiting list. And so while on the waiting list, he ended up getting drafted by

the Army. In a panic, he called his commanding officer who told him to get down there ASAP so they could get him sworn into the Air Force, therefore keeping him out of the Army.

While in the Air Force, Mike worked as a plane mechanic, in fact, he worked on the plane of Navy Admiral McCain. Yes you read that right; Navy Admiral McCain, the father of the late Senator John McCain. Mike recalled that while working closely with Admiral McCain, he would constantly speak of his family, specifically his son John who was also currently serving in the Navy at that time. When Senator John McCain was shot down and became a prisoner of war in Hanoi in October of 1967 during Operation Rolling Thunder, Mike remembered the emotional turmoil Admiral McCain was going through, having to be in “Admiral mode” weighing decisions and the fate of the country while simultaneously worrying about the fate of his son (and I’m sure trying to hide any “dad mode” moments).

While talking with Mike you can clearly see him almost having an internal battle with his emotions as he’s recalling this experience. For me and others like myself I’m sure, our experience with the Vietnam War comes from our history books and what is being taught in school and honestly, I’ve always felt like we only touch the surface if we’re able to even do that. It’s a very humbling and eye-opening experience to hear a veteran’s first hand experience and our history books just do not do our veterans justice. Trying to navigate this interview on to a more positive note, I asked Mike if there were any places he loved visiting while serving? He said he had two, Japan and the Philippines. I’ve heard both are beautiful countries and they are definitely on my bucket list of places to visit. I was only able to cross off London while I was in college.

I remember hearing how my grandfather took advantage of the GI Bill after he finished serving and had gone to college. I asked Mike if it was the same with him. He replied that yes, he did go to college. He attended Jersey City State at night and earned a Bachelors in Economics. While he is retired now, he worked with computers at Stevens Institute of Technology where he would also earn his Masters in Management Science.

Mike married his wife Nancy in 1982 and in those 37 years of marriage, they had 3 children: Suzanne, Steven and Karen. They also have 3 grandchildren: two girls and a boy. I asked him if he would consider his children and grandchildren his greatest accomplishment? He said jokingly, “Of course not! No, no of course they are one of the greatest accomplishments in my life but outside of my family, I would consider my work with the Boy Scouts one of my biggest accomplishments. In the 22+ years working with this organization, I’ve had 30 of my boys make it to Eagle Scout.” Wow that’s a pretty great achievement. For those who don’t know, an Eagle Scout is “the highest achievement or rank attainable in the Scouts BSA program of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). Since its inception in 1911, only four percent of Scouts have earned this rank after a lengthy review process.” So I definitely have to agree that having 30 make it to Eagle Scout during his 22+ years is something to be very proud of.

Mike is full of interesting stories but at the same time is a very humble man who will say his stories aren’t really that interesting. With all the work that he does with our veteran organizations and the Boy Scouts, he still makes time to volunteer at Sacred Heart Church. Mike went on to explain that he loves cooking at the pasta night dinner events for the special needs community. It’s clear that Mike is definitely someone who enjoys giving back, whether that be to his local community or fellow veterans.

I told Mike his torturing, ahem excuse me his interview, was almost over. He only had two questions left. The first question: If you could have lunch with anyone dead or alive, who would it be and why? This question clearly caught Mike off guard and you could see him fighting that internal emotional turmoil again. After taking a breath, Mike responded, “Senator John McCain.” Mike went on to explain that he wanted to share not only his experience of working with his father Admiral McCain but also what his father had said about him and how clearly proud he was of him. Mike said that he had one regret and that was not writing to the Senator when he had the opportunity.

And lastly, I asked Mike if he had any advice to share? He said this advice was directed at our veterans, “Take everything you can, everything you are entitled to. Grab it, because you’ve earned it.”

I know this interview touched on some highly sensitive subjects so I want to thank Mike for taking the time to meet with me and sharing some of his life experiences with us. I also want to say Thank You for your service and for all that you do now for your fellow veterans.