

Michael Finnegan

Growing up in a household with a father who was in the military, Michael Finnegan and his five siblings were no strangers to the words “military brat.” After moving from his home island of Guam to countless states, he ended up in Oklahoma where he graduated high school. After graduation, Michael decided to follow in his father’s footsteps and join the military. Many people would never guess that Michael is a veteran simply because he does not fit the stereotype. He has a sleeve tattoo that goes all the way up to his neck and always has his hair perfectly gelled into a faux-hawk, but don’t let his misleading appearance fool you. He began serving in 2005 and was honorably discharged in 2013. This is his story.

When asked why he joined the military, Michael explained that his mother had always wanted a picture with all her sons in uniform with their father. Although Michael’s mother was a major influence in his decision to join the army, he admitted there were a couple other factors that also persuaded him. He was offered a \$45,000 lump sum as well as a \$75,000 college tuition kickstarter. He joked “When someone offers you this much money while your friends are working at Popeyes, it’s hard to say no, especially when you’re only 18 years old” Before he knew it, he was off to training and beginning a completely new lifestyle of punctuality, discipline and harsh realities that would change his outlook on life.

Michael worked long and hard to become an E5 Sergeant in the Army. He was put through many rigorous tests, had to go through a seven year background check to receive secret clearance, become airborne qualified, and also had to be able to score at least a 110 GT score on his ASVAB, a test that is used to measure a person’s qualifications in certain military occupations. There was a lot of competition, but since Michael had experience with his five siblings, he was used to the competitive feeling. A typical day for Michael and his soldiers began at 4 a.m. His job as a leader was to make sure all of the other soldiers were ready to perform some type of physical training before starting their day. Other days

consisted of all the soldiers assembling after training and performing preventative maintenance checks and services (PMCS). Besides this, he loved being able to jump out of airplanes and helicopters because the adrenaline rush he felt was a feeling like no other. Regardless of how many times he had done it before, he would always get nervous right before jumping, but as soon as he jumped the nervousness would evolve into a rush of excitement. With that in mind, Michael realized that he got more nervous when having to give a speech in class than having to jump out of a plane. As one would expect, most days for Michael were long, busy, and certainly not typical for the average American.

As a man who has made many achievements and received numerous awards such as: Army Commendation Medals, Army Achievement Medals, Good Conduct Medals as well as multiple Certificates of Achievement throughout his military career. Michael admits “the most rewarding thing was serving at a time of war and alongside one percent of the U.S.A.” It was clear that this was a sensitive subject for him because his tone changed from lighthearted to earnest. After serving in Afghanistan for fifteen months, Michael realized that his experience had changed who he was. His Psychological Operations training has left him as a very observant person who is always aware of his surroundings, even in civilian life. After losing his father to leukemia and two of his cousins whom he “loved like brothers” in combat, he had become numb to situations people would normally find difficult and stressful. However, this did not stop Michael from opening up his heart to others around him. He would buy small gifts for the children in his unit while stationed in Afghanistan and smile as he watched them go berserk over things as common as colored pencils. He loved receiving care packages with drawings that children made for him, thanking him for his service. Despite suffering from PTSD, constant migraines, and a torn ACL, Michael considers himself nothing less than blessed because he has seen how abruptly lives can be lost.

After living his whole life in constant motion and serving in the military for eight years, he finally has a chance to breathe. Michael has always had a passion for music and collecting/selling sneakers. Now that things are finally beginning to settle down, he has a chance to pursue his hobbies and live life for himself doing what he loves. He goes to school, practices his music and catches up on everything he didn't get a chance to experience. In the near future, he plans on opening up a family business in Guam, as well as building a chemotherapy facility for the children on his mother's home island of Rota. Michael wants to be able to change lives and positively affect the people around him. At first glance when people see Michael, they assume he is a rebellious, punk kid fresh out of high school. Michael explains the reason why he does not flash his veteran status to everyone he meets: "When people find out that I'm a vet, their attitude towards me completely changes." When asked if he is bothered by the way people judge him based on his appearance, he smiled and said "No, because it gives me a chance to prove them wrong and show them who I really am." Michael Finnegan's true self contradicts the universal perception that society has. People say don't judge a book by its cover, and Michael Finnegan is the perfect example.

Works Cited

Finnegan, Michael. Personal Interview. 25 April. 2014