

Specialist Michael William O'Brien PS-28 (1948-2024)



Mike was born May 7, 1948 in Cincinnati to Patrolman James T. and Martha A. O'Brien. He attended Elder High School, graduating in 1966. By then, his father had been promoted to Police Specialist (formerly Detective).

Eight months out of high school, Mike joined the United States Navy. He was first assigned to Naval Aviation Station Miramar as a corrosion control man for aircraft. Eight months later, he volunteered as door gunner and aviation mechanic in



the Seawolves, the Navy's first and only rapid-reaction helicopter gunship squadron in the Vietnam War, officially named the Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron Three or HA(L)-3. The average lifespan of the crewmen was about 30 days. That of the door gunner was two weeks. Over 20 months, some 44 two-week periods, door gunner Mike O'Brien flew 580 combat missions. During one mission, his helicopter was mortared and crashed into a rice paddy. He suffered a five-inch piece of shrapnel through his left kneecap and a broken collar bone. In another crash, the tail rotor of the helicopter was struck and resulted in the copter going down into the My Tho River. On December 23, 1968, he was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal by the Commander of Naval Forces Vietnam.

In 1969, he was assigned to the U.S.S. Ranger, again as an Air Crewman and occasionally, Plane Captain. As the flagship for Carrier Division Three, the Ranger was often deployed

during the war, including once to Korea after North Korea shot down a C-130 transport plane, and once to fly sorties over Cambodia. On March 26th, the 200-ton ammo dump at Dong Tam was struck by mortar fire just as Mike's helicopter was taking off. The blast knocked the copter out of the sky, and it landed hard, knocking the occupants of the chopper. The pilot was trapped beneath it and, while standing in jet fuel with flaming debris falling all around, Mike grabbed a fire hose and kept the pinned pilot and region doused until the pilot was finally rescued. On January 19, 1970, Mike was awarded the country's third highest military decoration for valor in combat, the Silver Star, by CINCPAC (Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet) for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action by saving the lives of two aircrewmembers during an enemy attack on Dong Tam."

Petty Officer Third Class O'Brien was honorably discharged on February 17, 1971. Ever humble, on his Services in the U.S. Armed Forces (Police Personnel Form 442), Mike claimed he was awarded a Purple Heart, Silver Star, and Navy Commendation. He was actually awarded the Silver Star, two Purple Hearts (although wounded three other times), Naval Commendation Medal with V for Valor, Naval Achievement with V for Valor, 27 Air Medals, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, Vietnam Service Medal with three stars for the three major campaigns he served in, Combat Action Ribbon with two bronze stars for multiple awards, and Air Crewman Wings.



Nine days after his discharge, his brother, James T. O'Brien, Jr. joined the Cincinnati Police Division as a Police Recruit. On October 29, 1972, Mike joined his father and brother and entered the Cincinnati Police Division's 58th Recruit Class. He was promoted to Patrolman on February 25, 1973, issued Badge 334, and assigned to District 3 (3201 Warsaw Avenue). He was rotated to District 1 (310 Lincoln Park Drive) on April 28, 1974.

Between 1974 and 1980, he attended 88 hours of investigations training. Mike also attended the University of Cincinnati and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice in 1980. By 1978, he was assigned to the District 1 Investigative Unit. After white supremacist Joseph Paul Franklin famously gunned down two children in 1980, Officer O'Brien was detailed to the Homicide Squad as part of a five-man task force to investigate the murders. He never left. On May 16, 1982, he was officially transferred to Homicide. He worked the Franklin case, off and on, for more than 15 years before Franklin finally confessed. In 1982, he and others finished high enough on promotional exams to be promoted, but it took a lawsuit by many to get their due and he was finally promoted July 20, 1986 and issued Badge PS-28. During these trying times, he continued serving and earning high level performance evaluations in a squad that gained a national reputation for solving every murder for two successive years in 1982 and 1983. In 1999 he was declared by his supervisor as "one of the best detectives in the police division." He was also an FBI and OPOTA certified instructor. Specialist O'Brien retired on May 29, 2001 with 32½ years of stellar service to his country and community – 21 years of which as a Homicide detective – and 40 letters of appreciation and/or commendation, including four by Cincinnati police chiefs and four by Common Pleas Court judges, and one each from another city chief, Cincinnati Safety Director, Chief Hamilton County Assistant Prosecutor, Provident Bank vice president, and the Cincinnati FBI Field Office special agent in charge.

Specialist O'Brien suffered greatly, mentally and physically, in life. The horrors of war were a constant enemy. He suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, severe depression, and high anxiety. Within a decade of retirement, he was diagnosed with Chron's Disease. In 2020, he was additionally diagnosed with extreme anemia and Celiac Disease.

He died peacefully during the evening of May 1, 2024 a week before his 76th birthday.

He was predeceased by his siblings, Cincinnati Police Officer James O'Brien, Jr., Dennis (Pat) O'Brien, and Patricia (Ray) Egan. Specialist O'Brien is survived by his wife of 47 years, Rebecca (Reneau) O'Brien; children, Bret Bowman, Bryon (Chanel) Bowman, and Tracy (Troy) Borgemenke; grandchildren, Keleigh (Cole), Xaqariah, Eli, Taylor, Sydni, Rebeckah, Kelan, Deklan, Ainsley, Brooke and Holland; great-grandchildren, Levi, Chase, and Mitchell; siblings, John (Wendy) O'Brien, Bill (Connie) O'Brien, and Kevin (Elaine) O'Brien, Terry (Lori) O'Brien, and Kelly (Michele) O'Brien; and sister-in-law, Nancy O'Brien.

Visitation and FOP Service were held on Friday, May 10, 2024 at the Vitt, Stermer, and Anderson Funeral Home, 4916 Delhi Pike. A funeral service was held on Saturday, May 11, 2024 at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 4610 North Bend Road. On Monday, May 13, 2024, a cortege left the funeral home and proceeded to Kentucky Veterans Cemetery North at 205 Eibeck Lane, Williamstown, Kentucky where he was interred.

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