

CAPT Neil T. Kinnear III, USNR (Retired)

The son of a career Marine, CAPT Neil T. Kinnear III was born in Brooksville, FL, on February 6, 1949. He entered military service in the summer of 1967 with the United States Naval Academy class of 1971. Upon graduation in the summer of 1971, he was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. Upon completion of The Basic School (TBS), he entered flight training and was winged a Naval Aviator. Neil served with distinction as an aviator in the Marine Corps for the next five years at multiple commands, flying as a Cobra Pilot and Helicopter Training Squadron Instructor Pilot.

He left active duty in 1977, but, after several years of not flying, he secured a lateral transfer to the Navy Reserves. He was subsequently affiliated with the Red Wolves of HELICOPTER ATTACK LIGHT SQUADRON FOUR (HAL 4), flying the HH-1K Huey. He served in numerous billets while at HAL-4 and served as the first Executive Officer when the squadron transitioned to flying the HH-60H Sea Hawk and re-designated as HELICOPTER COMBAT SPECIAL SUPPORT SQUADRON FOUR (HCS-4). After he assumed command of HCS-4, he deployed with the squadron to Saudi Arabia, flying Combat Search and Rescue Missions in Iraq in direct support of Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM. After his command tour, Neil served in numerous Selected Reserve billets at multiple commands. He officially retired from the Navy Reserves in 2001.

In the civilian world, Neil was employed at multiple defense contractors. He worked on various projects and high visibility programs. His last employer was the Veridian Corporation where he worked as a Senior Analyst.

Neil was a hero in the truest sense of the word. He was a highly decorated Officer and a selfless man who would routinely go out of his way to help those in need. As a Marine Aviator, he was awarded the Navy/Marine Corps Medal for heroism when he risked his life and pulled a fellow aviator out of a burning helicopter. In January 2001, Neil was given a terminal diagnosis of Stage IV esophageal cancer. Rather than accept his fate, Neil adopted the attitude that if he was going down, he was not going down without a fight and his death would not be meaningless. He signed his e-mails "The Cancer Warrior" with the tag line, there is no second place in a dog fight. After consulting multiple institutions, Neil was accepted into an experimental stem cell treatment protocol at the National Institute of Health. Although the treatment would greatly degrade his quality of life and had very little chance of defeating the cancer, he entered it anyways with the mindset that even though his life would not be saved that the research would save somebody else's life in the future.

Neil lost his battle to cancer on October 30, 2001.

This scholarship is a testament to the man that Neil was and the life he lived. He never met a stranger and was the first person to devote his own time to help those in need. Although he is no longer with us, his spirit and his legacy live on in this scholarship.