

Dear Chairman Waxman,

I applaud you for your efforts to bring to light the deplorable behaviors of Blackwater as an organization, and specifically the individuals who own it and run it. I anticipate hearing what Mr. Eric Prince brings to the table in answering questions regarding his company's policies and actions. From my perspective as a widow, which status I must claim because of Blackwater's actions (and inactions), I appreciate that through your actions, our government is still strong enough to hold both large corporations and individuals accountable, no matter how wealthy, no matter what political affiliation, no matter what religion. I wish I could be present to face Mr. Prince personally, so he would have to look in my eyes and face the widow to which he is responsible, and I hope some day accountable; especially as he never felt compelled to even write so much as a note of sympathy after Mike's death.

I will tell you later the story of LTC Michael McMahon, who grew up in a humble family and decided to serve his country. He decided to serve, not for just a few years, to then move on to the private sector to make more money; but he decided to dedicate his life to this noble profession. He wore the Army uniform and swore to live up to the Army values until a tragic day in November 2004 when the Blackwater plane on which he was a passenger needlessly crashed in the frozen mountains of Afghanistan.

Mike, like Mr Prince, was a CEO of sorts in the military, as an aviation commander and as such had amassed a great safety record in his unit. It is ironic and unfortunate that he had to be a passenger on this plane, versus one of the people responsible for its safe operation. Some would say it was simply a tragic accident, and that accidents happen especially in a combat theater. But this accident was due to the gross lack of judgment in managing this company. The country has seen on the news repeatedly, the cavalier and indifferent manner in which this company has continue to operate – it allowed flight operations to go on, carelessly unchecked, poorly supervised, and blatantly in violation of commonly accepted aviation safety practices, resulting in needless casualties.

It couldn't have been stated any better than by a captain currently serving in the Army who said, "My impression of Blackwater after having served 10 months of my tour in Baghdad is that they are trigger happy, unrestrained by our army's rules of engagement, a danger to Iraqi civilians and coalition forces alike, behave as if they are above the law, are viewed as indiscriminate killers by the population, and have no business operating in a combat theater. The consensus among my peers is they are a liability, not an asset. Our government's money would be better spent on increasing the size of our regular army than on hiring."

If you had an opportunity to read the transcripts of the pilots who were trained by this company, on their last flight, like I did - you would see that they completely fulfilled

this sad but true description of “thrill-seeking cowboys loyal only to a paycheck” – they were more concerned with what type of music they could listen to and how to wire it into their headsets than the fact that they were lost; they boasted how much fun they were having and how much they got paid and how if anyone knew surely the gig would be up. I find it despicable that anyone running a corporation, whether for profit or not, could allow such a pervasive degradation to the mission at hand, especially in a field of work where lives were on the line.

I will never recover from this event, nor will my children. We appreciate the love and support we have received from our Army family, which continues to this day – never leave a fallen comrade is part of the Army’s Warrior Ethos. But in the end my children will forever be casualties – their wounds, although not visible at first, are noticeable and significant. In my mind they are another type of Wounded Warrior, struggling to make sense of it all. Whether it be struggling in school, struggling to be a teenager or a young adult in a fast paced world, they find themselves trying to keep up, dragging their crutch, and wondering what life would be like if this event had not happened. I am a very strong woman and I can’t imagine what would have happened to my family otherwise. I find myself more angry than sad that Mike is dead.

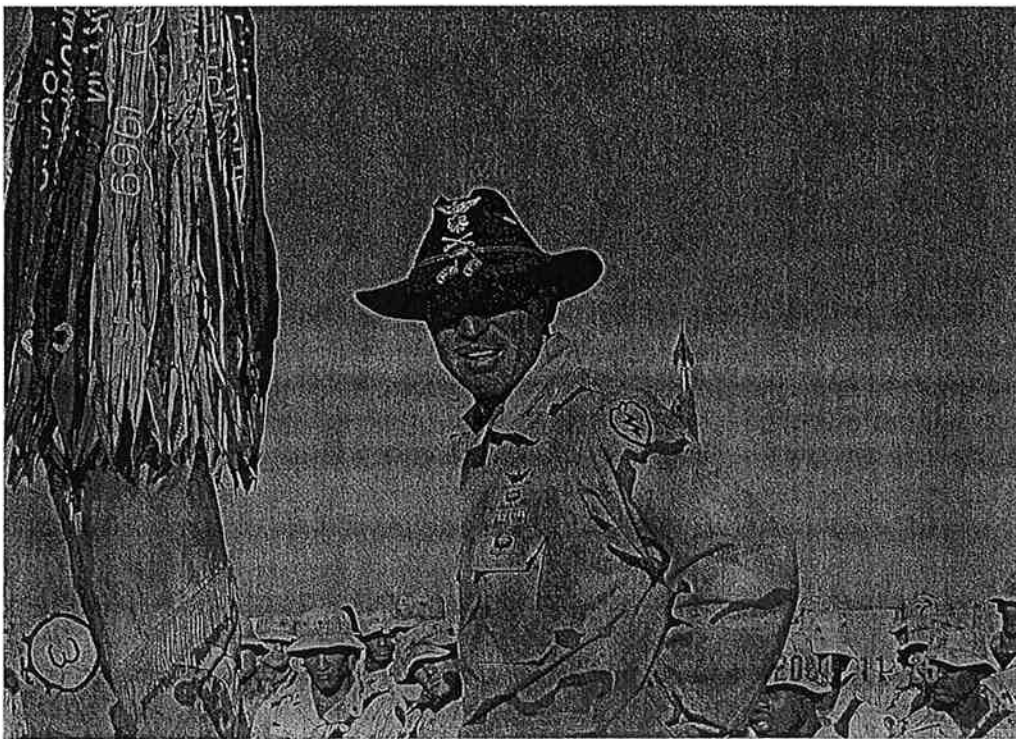
When Mike died, the Army had a Memorial Service that week – the boys and I attended and I told my 4 year old that if he behaved at the service he could ride his scooter outside in the parking lot afterwards. Not realizing of course that the media was camped outside when we emerged I decided to let him take his ride. The media politely asked if they could talk to him and I agreed. He proceeded with an amazing sense of understanding to explain to them what had happened to his father – that the plane flew in the wrong place – that it crashed and that his Dad had died. He would now be an angel in heaven and would make the stars come out at night. That night, many hours later, he reminded me that we needed to go outside – it was way past his bedtime – but again I relented as I tried to guide my son through the grief I could not comprehend of a 4 year old. I was dismayed as we stepped onto the lanai of our Hawaiian home and the sky was covered with clouds and as I tried to develop some sort of explanation in my mind as we headed to the picnic table, the sky, as if an arm brushed away the clouds, miraculously cleared and every star shone brightly. Not lost on this bright little boy, he beamed – I told you so! You see, those of us who knew Mike know the tremendous power he had to bring out the best in people. The fact that my children now live without that is very sad.

But there is another chapter – this boy 6 months later asked to go back out to the back yard to see the stars again. This time as I carried him out to the table I told him he could make a wish on the first star he saw – he immediately announced he wanted a dog, a real live dog - this had been a recurring discussion with him for years. But then he thoughtfully asked what I would want to wish on the star, and I blurted out that I wished we could go back in time to before Thanksgiving – and let it at that. He wouldn’t understand I thought. After a moment he asked to go down to the water – it was safe – there was a fence – and although I couldn’t see him clearly due to the hill in the yard and the darkness I let him go for a moment. As I sat there, I heard this deep voice saying “You can have the dog” I smiled. Then I heard, “And you can have your Dad back” and

my heart broke – as he made his way up to the table with a smirk on his face – I knew this boy would make it – here he was trying to ease my burden - I picked him up and hugged him and told him – You know – we can't get a dog, he shook his head, "and we can't get your Dad back" – and he shook his head – so what I am here to say today – is the McMahon family – we get it – we know we have to live with this grief and we intend to do it and to do it honorably – but the bottom line is that if people were doing the jobs they were paid to do – this would not have happened and I wouldn't be explaining to 3 boys, whose Dad had an immeasurable impact on their lives, why he is gone forever.

LTC Mike McMahon West Point (1985)

22 Oct 1963 - 27 Nov 2004



This picture was taken on Thanksgiving Day, 2 days before Mike was tragically and needlessly killed in a plane crash while serving in Operation Enduring Freedom. He was commanding the 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment from the 25th Infantry Division and was getting ready to address his Troopers after bringing all his Soldiers back to the base for a unit organization day and Thanksgiving celebration.

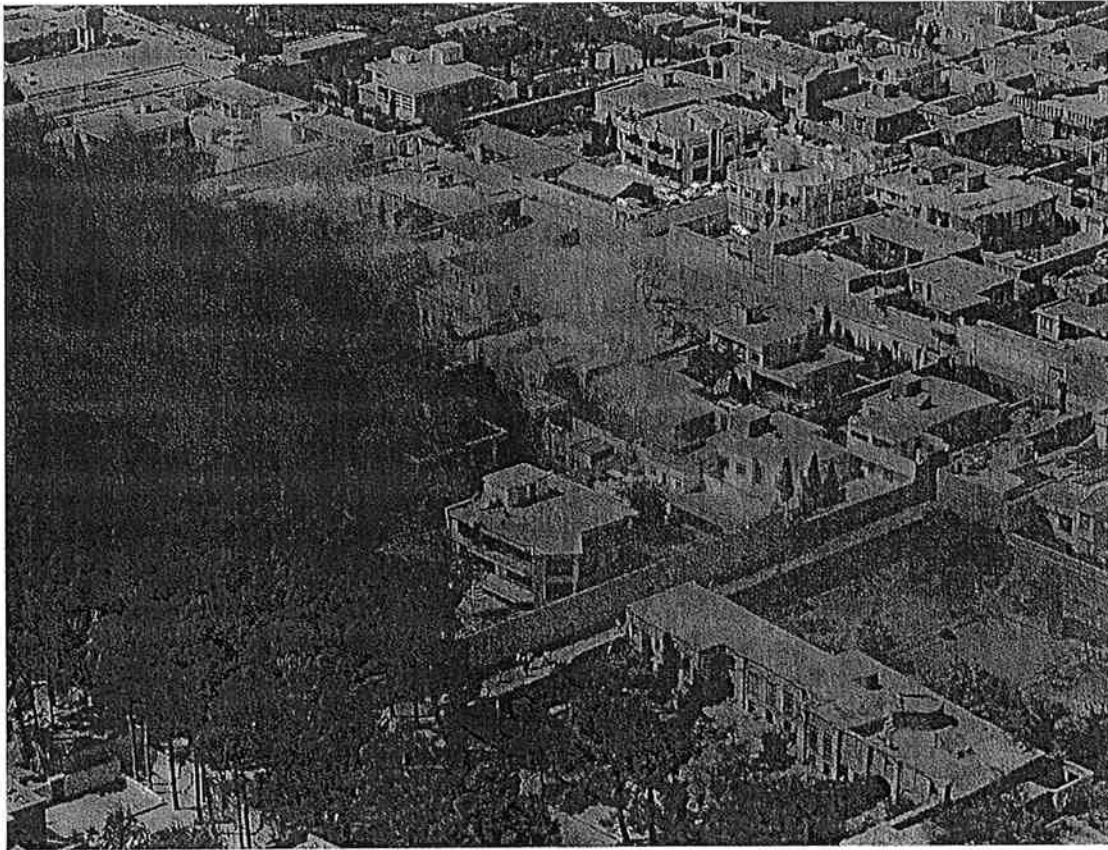
Mike wanted to attend West Point from an early age, likely influenced by his Dad, a retired Army aviator and his brother, Dennis McMahon III, a 1976 West Point Graduate who was killed in a car accident while when he was a Captain teaching at Ft Benning, and who is buried 3 plots away from Mike.

He spent 19 years serving his country and many Cavalry units to include 2/17th (Out Front), 7th Cavalry Regiment (Gary Owen), 21st Cav Bde, 1st Cav Div, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (Toujours Pret – Always Ready), and finally ¼ Cav (All Cav!) His life was focused on his faith, his family, and his fellow man and woman; he was a humble man who maintained a balance of life, love, laughter.

His squadron deployed to theater of operations in Afghanistan in May 2004 and was immediately on the ground conducting missions to stabilize the country for upcoming elections. After continued problems in the western region of the country and green on green factionalism that was hindering efforts to secure these provinces, Mike's unit was further deployed to the town of Herat, whose local leader was the notorious warlord, Ishmael Khan pictured in white with Mike to his right below (who was one of the few warlords to have some successes against the Russians in the 70's).



Not all the negotiations went smoothly, there was a riot in the city, and Mike found himself the senior leader on the ground to diffuse the situation. He and his troopers were able to rescue 80 UN workers whose compound was attacked and set on fire. Not without some injuries, but no loss of life. Many of his troopers were awarded for heroics that day, and Mike humbly received the Bronze Star with Valor device, and the Purple Heart (ironically from LTG Barno – his brother Dennis' West Point classmate). Smoke from the burning compound rises as the Blackhawk attempts to land.

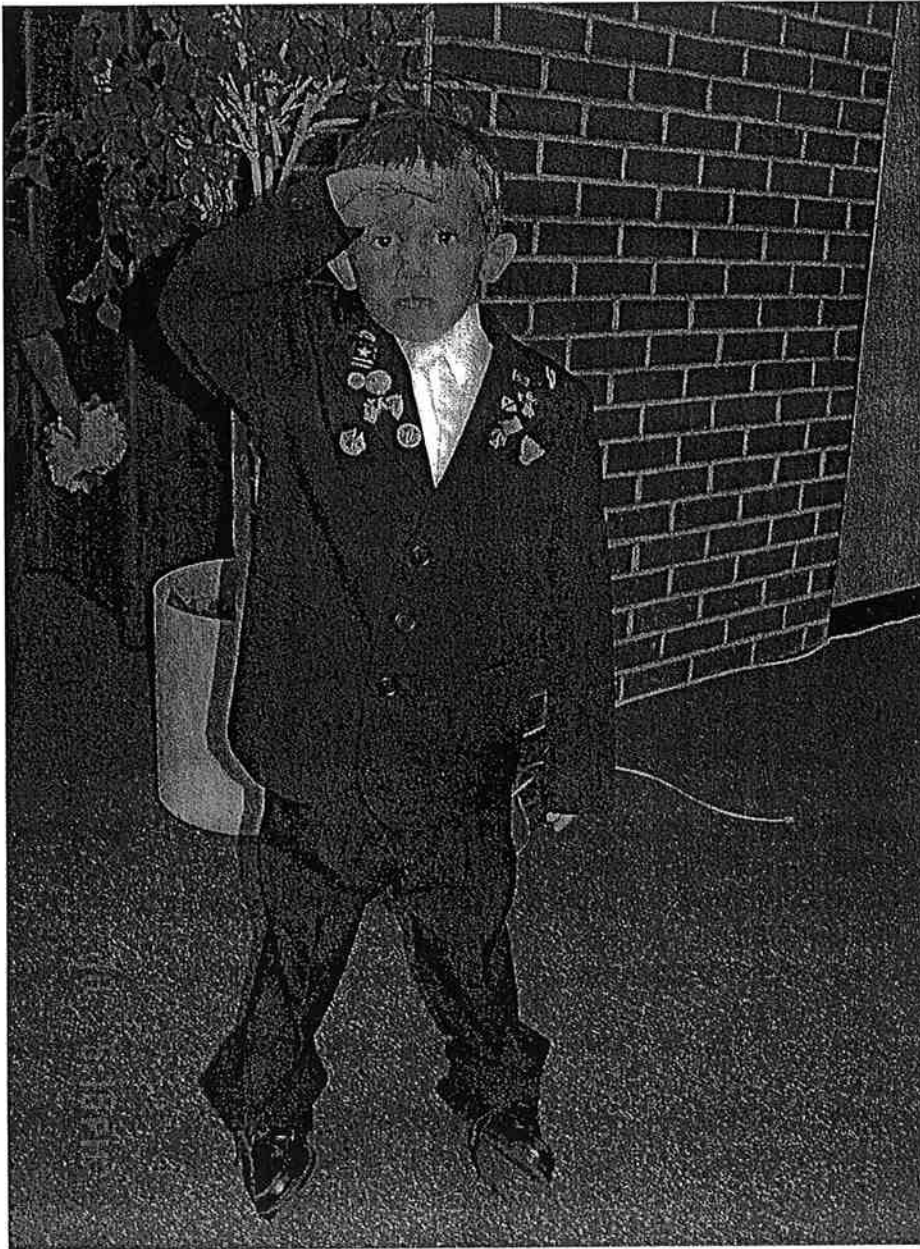


I ask you to remember three things when you remember Mike. First, that he and his Soldiers truly believed that the American people supported the troops, regardless of the voice given by the media to the very vocal but small minority. At Mike's funeral, LTG Jim Campbell, the official Army representative and a good friend stood by my side trying to present me the triangularly folded flag. I took a long moment to reach out and take it, as if by not accepting it I could somehow erase the reality of what had happened. But when, in his calm, and caring voice he spoke the words he had memorized, "On behalf of a grateful nation, I found the strength to put my hands around the flag, knowing not only in my heart, but knowing that Mike and the men and women in his unit knew that their sacrifice was not for naught, but that a grateful nation mourned along with me.

Second – as untimely and tragic as this event was, Mike was thankfully prepared. He did the necessary paperwork, had his finances in order, but more importantly his relationships were solid and meaningful – there were no loose ends, and most important of all his relationship with his God was where he believed it should be.

And third, that Mike’s legacy challenges all of us, his own sons, those Army warriors and comrades that only death forced him to leave behind, and succeeding graduates of the Long Gray Line at West Point to live up to the ideals and the values that we hold as essential to the American way of life and to what he pledged his life to support and defend, Duty, Honor, Country (as his youngest son attempts to

emulate with his last salute to his Dad.)



Mike was a great leader in war, and he was a great leader in peace and his love for life has made many reconsider how they live each day. He leaves behind a legacy of integrity, persistence and stamina and his family will harness his energy to continue to live life as it should be lived (Mike enjoys a sunset during his last days).



Submitted respectfully in his memory and in his honor by his widow, Jeanette M. McMahon Angresano on 28 Sep 07.

Jeanette M. McMahon