



A Nightmare's Prayer: A Marine Harrier Pilot's War in Afghanistan

Michael Franzak

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Winner of the 2012 Colby Award and the first Afghanistan memoir ever to be written by a Marine Harrier pilot, *A Nightmare's Prayer* portrays the realities of war in the twenty-first century, taking a unique and powerful perspective on combat in Afghanistan as told by a former enlisted man turned officer. Lt. Col. Michael "Zak" Franzak was an AV-8B Marine Corps Harrier pilot who served as executive officer of VMA-513, "The Flying Nightmares," while deployed in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2003. The squadron was the first to base Harriers in Bagram in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. But what should have been a standard six-month deployment soon turned to a yearlong ordeal as the Iraq conflict intensified. And in what appeared to be a forgotten war half a world away from home, Franzak and his colleagues struggled to stay motivated and do their job providing air cover to soldiers patrolling the inhospitable terrain.

I wasn't in a foxhole. I was above it. I was safe and comfortable in my sheltered cocoon 20,000 feet over the Hindu Kush. But I prayed. I prayed when I heard the muted cries of men who at last understood their fate.

Franzak's personal narrative captures the day-by-day details of his deployment, from family good-byes on departure day to the squadron's return home. He explains the role the Harrier played over the Afghanistan battlefields and chronicles the life of an attack pilot—from the challenges of nighttime, weather, and the austere mountain environment to the frustrations of working under higher command whose micromanagement often exacerbated difficulties. In vivid and poignant passages, he delivers the full impact of enemy ambushes, the violence of combat, and the heartbreaking aftermath.

And as the Iraq War unfolded, Franzak became embroiled in another battle: one within himself. Plagued with doubts and wrestling with his ego and his belief in God, he discovered in himself a man he loathed. But the hardest test of his lifetime and career was still to come—one that would change him forever.

A stunning true account of service and sacrifice that takes the reader from the harrowing dangers of the cockpit to the secret, interior spiritual struggle facing a man trained for combat, *A Nightmare's Prayer* brings to life a Marine's public and personal trials set against "the fine talcum brown soot of Afghanistan that permeated everything—even one's soul."

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