

Christian F. Schilt: Aviation Pioneer



During a chance meeting in 1956 with a Marine staff sergeant, LtGen Christian Schilt noticed that the Marine looked perplexed as he noted the distinctive blue ribbon above the general's gold wings. He gave the sergeant a friendly pat on the shoulder, and with a smile advised: "Nothing is worn above the Medal of Honor, Sergeant."

On June 28, 1928, in a ceremony on the White House lawn, the President of the United States, Calvin Coolidge, affixes the Medal of Honor to the blouse of 1stLt Christian F. Schilt's dress uniform. Known from coast to coast, the Marine Corps aviator receives offers of executive positions from commercial airlines that are just getting started and will in time be nationally known. He politely declines. His desire is to remain a Marine, and it is as a Marine that he is in the forefront of Marine Corps aviation development during the decade of the 1930s.

During World War II, noticeably older than the romanticized image of a fighter pilot, Schilt flies combat missions in the Pacific. He qualifies in jet aircraft, and later as Commanding General, First Marine Aircraft Wing, old enough now to be the father of most of the men he commands, he flies a Grumman

F9F Panther in support of Marines on the ground in Korea.

At 60 years of age he qualifies as a helicopter pilot.

In 1957, after 40 years of service to country and Corps, Lieutenant General Christian F. Schilt, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps for Aviation, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, transfers to the retired list. Upon retirement he is advanced to four star rank.

He dies on Jan. 8, 1987, and is interred with full honors due a general officer in Arlington National Cemetery.

Baseball enthusiasts are firm in their belief that only Joe Dimaggio could make hitting a baseball appear so effortless, graceful and simple. Schilt could make flying an airplane look easy enough for a child.

Maj Allan C. Bevilacqua, USMC (Ret)

Quilali's primitive runway. Anything else is too big and too slow. The Corsair alone boasts an engine powerful enough to become airborne and clear the dominating hills. But what pilot is going to undertake what from all appearances would be a suicide mission?

1stLt Christian F. "Frank" Schilt examines the photographs of Quilali's field expedient airstrip, and in a matter-of-fact manner states his willingness to take on the job. He does not say he will *try* to get in and out of Quilali; he says he *will* get in and out of Quilali. This is not braggadocio.

Frank Schilt does not deal in bombast. After evaluating the facts he concludes that the mission can be successfully undertaken and makes his decision accordingly.

This straightforward manner has been an inherent characteristic of Schilt's personality since his days as an enlisted aircrewman flying anti-submarine patrols out of the Azores during the First World War. His driving desire to become an aviator led him to be accepted for flight training and become a designated naval aviator as a corporal prior to being commissioned. He is a natural pilot whose flying skills have

led him to be called a man who "could fly a bathtub, if someone put wings on one." If any man can fly in and out of Quilali that man is Frank Schilt.

During the next three days Schilt flies 10 missions in and out of Quilali. He does this all on his own. The rear seat of the Corsair carries no gunner; the space is needed for ammunition and rations going in and for a wounded Marine coming out. Schilt has even had the Corsair's forward firing machine guns removed to reduce weight. He is a sitting duck for the Sandinistas on the heights that dominate the

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