



Celebrating a Hero's Life



Enrique S. Camarena
July 26, 1947 – March 5, 1985

Hero's Life

Born on July 26, 1947 in the small town of Mexicali in Baja California, Mexico, Enrique "Kiki" Camarena and his family moved to Calexico, California in 1956. Enrique graduated from Calexico Union High School in 1966. He joined the U.S. Marine Corps in February 1968 and was stationed in San Diego. During his two year tour with the Marine Corps, Camarena served as a Legal Clerk and received the National Defense Service Medal.

Following his discharge from the Marine Corps in 1970, Enrique worked as a fireman for the City of Calexico and attended Imperial Valley College where he earned an Associates degree in 1972. He joined the Calexico, California Police Department in 1970. In May 1973, he was assigned to El Centro, California, where he served for 13 months as a Narcotics Investigator for Imperial County.

Enrique married Geneva "Mika" Alvarado and together they had three sons, Enrique, Daniel and Eric.

Enrique joined the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in June 1974. During his time with DEA, Special Agent Camarena served in Calexico, California. He was sent to the Fresno, California office in September 1977 and then to the Guadalajara, Mexico office in July 1981.

"What's gonna have to happen? Does somebody have to die before anything is done? Is somebody going to have to get killed?" These words spoken by Kiki Camarena about the grave drug problem he saw from his vantage point in DEA's Guadalajara, Mexico office would prove prophetic.

Hero's Death

On Thursday, February 7, 1985, at 2:00 p.m. Special Agent Camarena left the American Consulate in Guadalajara to meet his wife, Mika, for lunch. Kiki had been in Mexico for four and one-half years on the trail of Mexico's marijuana and cocaine barons. He was due to be reassigned in three weeks, having come dangerously close to unlocking a multi-billion drug dollar pipeline.

As Kiki neared his truck, he was approached by five men who shoved him into a beige Volkswagen Atlantic. One of the men threw a jacket over Kiki's head and the driver sped away.

On March 5, the body of Kiki Camarena was found on a ranch outside of the town of Zamora, Mexico, approximately 60 miles outside of Guadalajara along with the body of a slain Mexican pilot. Autopsy reports indicated that Special Agent Camarena had been tortured and beaten. Three days after his body was discovered he was returned to the United States for burial.

Red Ribbon

Following the death of Special Agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena and the press attention that the killing generated, U.S. Congressman Duncan Hunter, member of the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, and Henry Lozano, a high school friend of Kiki's and Director of Teen Challenge, a drug abuse prevention and counseling organization, met to discuss plans to develop "Camarena Clubs" throughout their El Cajon, California area. These "Camarena Clubs" were formed to unite students, teachers and others in the community against drug abuse.



The first "Camarena Club" was started on April 20, 1985, at Calexico Union High School in Calexico, California, the same high school from which Camarena graduated in 1968. The following week, members of that club, along with Congressman Hunter's wife, Lynne, presented First Lady Nancy Reagan with the "Camarena Club Proclamation."

The summer of 1985 saw a surge in national interest in the memory of Kiki and the problems of drug abuse. The Virginia Federation of Parents and the Illinois Drug Education Alliance called on every American to wear red ribbons to symbolize their commitment to help reduce the demand for drugs in their communities. Since then, the Red Ribbon campaign has taken on national significance.

Today, Red Ribbon Week is celebrated annually October 23rd-31st in cities across the country. During Red Ribbon Week, young people in communities across the nation pledge to live a drug-free lifestyle by wearing red ribbons and participating in community-wide anti-drug events. Red Ribbon Week is also a time to pay tribute to DEA Special Agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, whose death led to the creation of the Red Ribbon program.

Red Ribbon Week is a unified way for communities to take a stand against drugs and show intolerance for illicit drug use. Schools, businesses, the faith community, media, families, and community coalitions, join together to celebrate Red Ribbon Week in many ways, such as sponsoring poster and essay contests; organizing drug-free races; decorating buildings in red; handing out red ribbons to customers; holding parades, or community events; and by promoting the value of a drug-free healthy lifestyle.

For more information about Red Ribbon Week, go to www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com.

Living Drug Free