

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

HALL OF HEROES

MEDAL OF HONOR INDUCTION CEREMONY

CORPORAL JASON DUNHAM, USMC

FRIDAY, JANUARY 12, 2007

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ANNOUNCER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Medal of Honor induction ceremony for Corporal Jason L. Dunham, United States Marine Corps. Yesterday, the president of the United States presented our nation's highest military award for valor to Corporal Dunham's mother Deborah, his father Daniel, brothers Justin and Kyle, and his sister Katlyn.

This morning, the United States Marine Corps will pay its respect to this brave non-commissioned officer, and the deputy secretary of defense, the secretary of the Navy and commandant of Marine Corps formally induct Corporal Dunham into the Pentagon's most sacred place, the Hall of Heroes.

Ladies and gentlemen, please rise to the arrival of the official party and remain standing for the playing of our national anthem.

(National anthem played.)

ANNOUNCER: Please be seated.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Commandant of the Marine Corps General James T. Conway.

GENERAL JAMES CONWAY: Good morning to the Dunham family, Secretary England, Secretary Winter, Admiral Giambastiani, and to our many distinguished guests. We gather today in the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes to honor one of our own. This is a small place tucked in the corner of our nation's military headquarters, but despite its relative size, it holds a vast accounting of all that is best about America. The Greek historian Thucydides correctly told us that the bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, yet notwithstanding go out to meet it.

The names of the men etched in this room represent the bravest of the brave, who understood the danger and yet went out to meet it. The constant of their actions and the powerful motivation behind each of their deeds I believe was a sense of camaraderie. They unselfishly offered up their lives, so that their fellow fighting men might live.

The Congressional Medal of Honor was the creation of two of our greatest presidents. George Washington conceived the medal in 1782. Abraham Lincoln crafted it into law in 1861. The first Marine to win the Medal of Honor was Corporal John Mackie. While aboard the USS Galena on the James River in May of 1862, his ship came under intense fire from the bluffs overlooking the river. With the decks awash in the blood of his shipmates, Corporal Mackie led his Marines through a hail of iron and lead to man the cannons, whose crews had been killed or wounded. They drove off the

attackers with well-aimed fire, thus in the estimate of all saving the ship and all of the lives of those aboard.

The last Marine to win our nation's highest award was Corporal Miguel Keith. In May of 1969, almost 38 years ago now, Corporal Keith was assigned to a combined actions platoon in Vietnam. His squad and their assigned village was attacked repeatedly by over 100 well armed North Vietnamese soldiers. Corporal Keith met each attack with the termination and the sustained fires of his machinegun. Wounded several times, he stayed at the gun until the attackers were driven off. Corporal Keith died of his wounds knowing that he had more than done his duty and that his buddies would be okay.

Today, we honor the memory of yet another Marine who sacrificed his life in the heat of battle so that his comrades might live. When he placed his helmet and then his body on that enemy grenade, he did so willingly, he did it bravely, and I'm convinced did it solely to prevent the death of those Marines around him. He realized the danger and he went out to meet it.

Ladies and gentlemen, today we add to this Hall of Heroes the name of a great young American who deservedly joins the ranks of those who cause us to simply stand in awe of their courage and sacrifice. Today we honor the life and the combat actions of Corporal Jason Dunham, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, United States Marine Corps.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're fortunate to have with us today the Honorable Donald Winter, secretary of the Navy.

DONALD WINTER: Ladies and gentlemen, friends and family, distinguished guests, it is a profoundly moving and humbling experience to have this opportunity to honor an American hero. Every generation wonders whether it will live up to the lofty standards set by its forbearers, whether it will produce heroes of character and courage in such measure that the American success story will endure. War has forced this question into the open. Today we found ourselves a nation at war fighting terrorist enemies who seek our destruction, a goal they openly proclaim.

This generation of Americans stands in their way, and on the field of battle out of this generation, at a moment when the lives of his fellow Marines were in gravest danger, Corporal Jason Dunham bravely stepped forward to make the ultimate sacrifice. All Americans owe their freedom to brave men such as Jason Dunham. His gift to the country he loved, to the Corps he revered, and to his fellow Marines was the sacred gift of valor. It is a gift that will outlive him. It is a gift that will inspire this generation to follow in his footsteps and carry on his example of courage during our country's present time of testing. It is a gift that future generations will learn about and cherish.

Jason Dunham's sacrifice has left us with a debt we can never repay. All we can do is honor his name and pay tribute to his heroic deeds. With us today to enshrine Jason Dunham's name in the Hall of Heroes is Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England. It is most appropriate that Secretary England, who was secretary of the Navy at the time

of this event, is here with us today to honor the sacrifice of Jason Dunham, a brave Marine who follows in a long line of brave Marines.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Honorable Gordon England.

GORDON ENGLAND: So the family, Deb and Dan and to your whole family, welcome. It was delightful to have some time with you before this ceremony today to see you again. You are truly great Americans and just as all of us are proud of Jason, Jason would also be extraordinarily proud of you today.

Welcome also to Jason's brothers-in-arms from the United States Marine Corps. And welcome to all of Jason's family and friends, and especially all of those who traveled from his hometown in Scio, New York.

Yesterday, President Bush presented the Dunham family with this nation's highest award for valor in Jason's name, the Medal of Honor. Today, it is this department's honor to recognize this great hero and his family, as his name is inscribed here in the Department of Defense's Hall of Heroes.

I grew up in Baltimore, Maryland just down the road. I've never served in the military, but early on in my life I learned something about what it means to be a hero. On December the 7th, 1941, on the day of Pearl Harbor I was four years old. America went to war. The nation went to war. And I still remember as a lad the blackouts, the ration stands, and the newsreels at the local theater. And in my neighborhood – a neighborhood of row houses in Baltimore, there was a grass covered, very small square where four or five streets came together and where all of us kids used to play.

One day in 1945, workers put up a sign on that square, just a small – like a street sign, but I remember it well. And the sign said, Francis Callahan Jr. Square. That night my parents told me that the Callahan family lived in the house right there on the square. Their son, Francis Callahan, Jr., a Marine, had been killed at Iwo Jima. So his parents named the square after him. I learned then at a young age that war meant sacrifice. It meant sacrifice for the individual and sacrifice for his family. Now, no servicemen or women go to war intending to make the ultimate sacrifice. In fact, every Marine who went to Iwo expected to come home.

While warfighters do die in combat, they don't choose to do so. But there are rare heroes who affirmatively make the decision to do an extraordinary thing: to give up their lives for others. And that's a decision that Jason made in April, 2004, in Husaybah, and that's the reason we gather here today: to stand in awe of that choice he made and to pay tribute to that sacrifice. Like Jason and Francis Callahan, Jr., from Baltimore, there was another Marine who gave everything he had to give, Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone. Sergeant Basilone was born in Buffalo not far from Jason's home town of Scio.

In October, 1942, in Guadalcanal, Sergeant Basilone, under constant enemy fire, battled through enemy lines to bring his gunners the shells they needed and he helped

guarantee the annihilation of the Japanese who were attacking, saved his men, and he was awarded – Sergeant Basilone – the Medal of Honor. But that wasn't all. A couple of years later, rather than let others take his place in combat, Sergeant Basilone volunteered again for action and returned to the fight in the Pacific. And in 1945, also in Iwo, an enemy mortar round exploded and took his life as he was taking care of his fellow Marines.

So, Dan and Deb, I mention Sergeant Basilone because I believe that heroes like Sergeant Basilone and your son Jason share the same fundamental character and the same profound sense of responsibility for others. If Jason had survived and continued on as a Marine, or become a police officer or a firefighter, I am confident he would have again put himself in harm's way to save others. It's who he is. It is his profound sense of responsibility for others that always shines through in people like Jason, whatever the situation demands.

The Medal of Honor is surrounded by grandeur, but at the end of the day what it reflects in its simplicity is the character of each hero who receives it, and each hero's character in turn is a reflection of the people who have had the greatest influence on him over time: his friends, his community, his fellow soldiers, his community, and most of all his family. This nation is eternally grateful to Jason and eternally grateful to his family.

The important thing is that what Jason did lives on after him. If he were here today, Jason would probably tell you that he is just a caretaker of a medal than many deserve. Jason, and all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, remind us of the price of freedom. It's a price that is periodically required to be paid in blood and suffering and courage.

And in this new war on terror it's a price that has been paid here in the Pentagon, in New York, in Pennsylvania, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and wherever the brave men and women who wear the cloth of our nation serve.

God bless Jason's family. May they be comforted in their grief. God bless Jason's comrades in arms in the United States Marine Corps. May they, too, be comforted and uplifted by his example. May God continue to bless this great American nation. May we all be inspired by Jason, his family, and his fellow American heroes to respond to life's greatest challenges with self sacrifice, courage and dignity.

Jason, God bless. Semper fidelis.

ANNOUNCER: Attention to orders.

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, March 3rd, 1863 has awarded in the name of Congress the Medal of Honor to Corporal Jason L. Dunham, United States Marine Corps for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Rifle Squad

Leader, 4th Platoon, Company K, Third Battalion, Seventh Marines (Reinforced),
Regimental Combat Team 7, First Marine Division (Reinforced) on 14 April 2004.

Corporal Dunham's squad was conducting a reconnaissance mission in the town of Karabilah, Iraq, when they heard rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire erupt approximately two kilometers to the west. Corporal Dunham led his Combined Anti-Armor Team towards the engagement to provide fire support to their Battalion Commander's convoy, which had been ambushed as it was traveling to Camp Husaybah. As Corporal Dunham and his Marines advanced, they quickly began to receive enemy fire. Corporal Dunham ordered his squad to dismount their vehicles and led one of his fire teams on foot several blocks south of the ambushed convoy.

Discovering seven Iraqi vehicles in a column attempting to depart, Corporal Dunham and his team stopped the vehicles to search them for weapons. As they approached the vehicles, an insurgent leaped out and attacked Corporal Dunham. Corporal Dunham wrestled the insurgent to the ground and in the ensuing struggle saw the insurgent release a grenade. Corporal Dunham immediately alerted his fellow Marines to the threat. Aware of the imminent danger and without hesitation, Corporal Dunham covered the grenade with his helmet and body, bearing the brunt of the explosion and shielding his Marines from the blast.

In an ultimate and selfless act of bravery in which he was mortally wounded, he saved the lives of at least two fellow Marines. By his undaunted courage, intrepid fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty, Corporal Dunham gallantly gave his life for his country, thereby reflecting great credit upon himself and upholding the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated.

At this time, Corporal Dunham will officially be inducted into the Hall of Heroes as the plaques representing his Medal of Honor is now unveiled.

Ladies and gentlemen, would you please rise.

DEBORAH DUNHAM: Here's where I'm telling students to please take a seat. I really don't know what I'm going to say. Dan said say it from my heart, and Kate said, don't take too long, mom. In August 12th, 1988, the best gift I received was marrying my best friend. When I married him, I married two little boys too. And it was a gift and we had two more children and we've been blessed so very much. In April, 2004, a nightmare hit, and I lost not only our oldest son, but one of my best friends, and Dan and I have worked through that hole and watched three more children reach new heights – unbelievable heights.

And we've had several people who have filled this hole greatly. We acquired a Marine family and it's huge, and they're loving and they're strong and they're gentle and they're kind and they're ever so supportive. And we gave them a young man who

couldn't remember to take out the garbage, who tormented with practical jokes that were fun and never malice – just enjoyable, and the Marines polished him and they made him into a phenomenal person. And Dan always told the kids, just do what's right, and he did and you guys always do.

You protect this country. Many of you have served many years before this particular conflict and you've let us raise our children safe and free and that's a gift that we've received. So as much as this has hurt, we've got so many gifts, the gifts from the public with the cards, the phone calls, the gifts of a thousand more sons than we can ever begin to remember, and the gift of having each other. And Jason gave the gift of love and I'm so proud of him.

Thank you. (Applause.)

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, this time would you please remain standing for the playing of the Anchors Aweigh, the Marine Hymn, and for the departure of the official party.

(Musical break.)

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes our ceremony. On behalf of the commandant, thank for your attendance and semper fidelis.

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