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The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Panetta:

When we last talked in June, you stated your intention to comprehensively review new evidence supporting the Medal of Honor for Marine Corps Sergeant Rafael Peralta. I want to reiterate both my appreciation and support for your attention to the case of Peralta, who, according to eyewitness accounts and substantial evidence, pulled a grenade into his body and absorbed the blast in order to protect his fellow Marines.

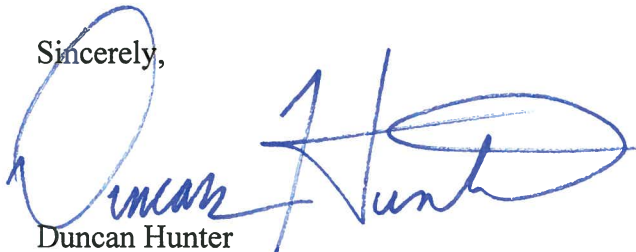
Similar to Peralta, new reports of misplaced paperwork pertaining to Army Captain Will Swenson's Medal of Honor nomination, possibly for reasons of questioning rules of engagement in Afghanistan, underscore yet another serious flaw in the awards process. For the Medal of Honor, nominations for at least two individuals—Swenson and Peralta— have been unfairly derailed by what appears to be nothing more than bureaucratic influence and arbitrary reasoning.

In the case of Peralta specifically, multiple and conforming eyewitness accounts were blatantly ignored, along with indisputable evidence. In the end, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates downgraded Peralta's nomination, awarding him the Navy Cross, based on the assumption that he could not have reached for the grenade and pulled it into his body due to a head wound from a ricocheted bullet fragment. This conclusion, reached several years after Peralta's nomination was submitted, directly contradicted multiple first-hand accounts and indisputable evidence confirming his deliberate action. Video evidence also shows the grenade did not detonate one to three feet from Peralta's left knee, as Secretary Gates wrongfully asserted.

In Swenson's situation, the fact that his nomination was somehow lost, only to resurface when his story started gaining traction within the news media, is equally troubling. Both cases involve significant errors in process and judgment by Pentagon officials—including the former Secretary of Defense. Now that Swenson's nomination package awaits your review, I trust that you will give his recommendation fair and due consideration. In the case of Peralta, it is my hope that you will come to a decision soon, if you have not already.

Peralta's Medal of Honor is long overdue while Swenson never received the thorough and unbiased review he deserved. There are others who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan who fit into these same categories, but a favorable decision for Peralta in particular will go a long way toward restoring credibility to a process that has failed to deliver the proper recognition for heroic acts worthy of the Medal of Honor.

Sincerely,



Duncan Hunter
Member of Congress