

Marine to Receive Medal of Honor for Iraq Heroism

(CNN) -- President Bush announced on Friday that the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military decoration, will be awarded posthumously to Marine Cpl. Jason Dunham.

In April 2004, Dunham was leading a patrol in an Iraqi town near the Syrian border when the patrol stopped a convoy of cars leaving the scene of an attack on a Marine convoy, according to military and media accounts of the action.

An occupant of one of the cars attacked Dunham and the two fought hand to hand. As they fought, Dunham yelled to fellow Marines, "No, no watch his hand." The attacker then dropped a grenade and Dunham hurled himself on top of it, using his helmet to try to blunt the force of the blast.

Still, Dunham was critically wounded in the explosion and died eight days later at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland.

"As long as we have Marines like Corporal Dunham, America will never fear for her liberty," Bush said Friday as he announced that Dunham would receive the award. Bush spoke at the dedication of the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Virginia.

"His was a selfless act of courage to save his fellow Marines," Sgt. Maj. Daniel A. Huff of the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, was quoted as saying in Marine Corps News that April.

"He knew what he was doing," Lance Cpl. Jason A. Sanders, 21, of McAllester, Oklahoma, who was in Dunham's company, was quoted as saying by Marine Corps News. "He wanted to save Marines' lives from that grenade."

In various media accounts, fellow Marines told how Dunham had extended his enlistment shortly before he died so he could help his comrades.

"We told him he was crazy for coming out here," Lance Cpl. Mark E. Dean, 22, from Owasso, Oklahoma, said in Marine Corps News. "He decided to come out here and fight with us. All he wanted was to make sure his boys made it back home."

"He loved his country, believed in his mission, and wanted to stay with his fellow Marines and see the job through," Vice President Dick Cheney said when speaking of Dunham's heroism at a Disabled American Veterans conference in July 2004.

The Scio, New York, native would have been 25 years old on Friday.

In a letter urging Bush to honor Dunham with the Medal of Honor, Sen. Charles Schumer, D-New York, called the Marine's actions "an act of unbelievable bravery and selflessness."

Dunham's story was told in the book "The Gift of Valor," written by Wall Street Journal reporter Michael Phillips.

Dunham will be the second American to receive the Medal of Honor from service in Iraq.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Paul Ray Smith was the other, honored for action near Baghdad International Airport in April 2003, in which he killed as many as 50 enemy combatants while helping wounded comrades to safety. Smith was the only U.S. soldier killed in the battle.