

## **Dunham and Ceremony Impressive**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - "Impressive," from the grandmother who watched him grow up.

"Impressive," from the woman who held his hand moments after he threw himself on a grenade on a dusty street in Iraq, and suffered critical wounds that would end his life.

"Impressive," from the man who wrote about it.

Impressive was the word of the day as 100 specially invited guests of Dan and Deb Dunham, parents of Cpl. Jason Dunham, witnessed the ceremony where the man they knew, and loved became only the second Marine in 30 years to receive the Medal of Honor.

Pat Layton, Dan Dunham's mother and Jason's grandmother is the matriarch of the family that gathered in Washington, D.C. Thursday and received first class treatment from the U.S. Marine Corps.

"Jason would have loved all this, but he would have wondered what all the big fuss was about," she said.

The big fuss was the ceremony in the East Room of the President's mansion where the portraits of George and Martha Washington watched over the proceedings which was lit by golden daylight from outside and a shimmering crystal chandelier from within. After rubbing shoulders with the Vice President, the Joint Chief's of Staff, congressmen, senators, and other Medal of Honor recipients the guests seemed to have the run of the first floor of the White House. They wandered in and out of the Red Room, the Green Room and the Blue Room, watched the President depart from the East Balcony and dined on White House cuisine in the State Dining room, where heads of state dine with the President.

The ladies retired to a restroom where famous portraits of Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson and Eleanor Roosevelt watched over an ornate alcove. The gentlemen passed through a room lined with bookshelves and the portraits of Native Americans. All passed by the black-draped portrait of Gerald Ford, and the well-known poses of John F. Kennedy Ronald Regan, Theodore Roosevelt and the original cowboy bronzes by Frederick Remington.

The family and guests were bused to the ceremony on three Marine Corps buses that bore the eerie shadows of stony-faced Marines on their one-way windows that were easier to see out of, than into.

“It's the impression the Marines want to make,” said Navy Commander Heidi Kraft.

A California girl, Kraft who is in the mental health field, was on duty at the military hospital near Karabilah, Iraq when Dunham was brought in.

“Heidi is an angel. I think she is the only reason Jason got back, because she talked to him and gave him the will to get back to us like he promised,” said Deb Dunham of the woman who has become a family friend.

Kraft said she was honored to be at the ceremony, and asked to have her photo taken with two Medal of Honor recipients who were in attendance. Hundreds of soldiers passed through the hospital but Jason is the one she remembers.

“Rule number one is that young men die in war. Rule number two is that doctors can't do anything about it,” she said quoting from the popular television show MASH. Kraft has written a book, originally for her children, about her experience in Iraq. “They're only four now, and they don't even remember that I was gone. But I want them to know about why their mother was gone for eight months, and some day they'll want to know,” she reasons.

Little and Brown is publishing the book “Rule No. 2” in October; there is a chapter about Dunham.

Michael Phillips, a war correspondent for the Wall Street Journal, became a Dunham family member while collecting information for the book he wrote, “The Gift of Valor.”

The book is a detailed account of Dunham's last days and the act of heroism that ended his life, but saved the lives of two of his patrol members. It was the first detailed account the Dunham's received concerning their son's death, and the book was officially released in Scio. While writing the book Phillips visited with the family.

As they rode the buses from the White House to the Marine Barracks Washington, on to Capitol Hill where everyone stood for photos with New York senator's Charles E. Schumer and Hillary Clinton before taking staff-led tours of the Senate and rotunda “impressive” was the oft-repeated word. Impressive referring as much to one beloved young man's act of heroism as it did the pomp and circumstance surrounding the ceremony and the proud tradition of the U.S. Marine Corps.