

Marine Corps Honors Late Iraq Medal of Honor Recipient

There's a picture that shows the remains of Marine Cpl. Jason L. Dunham's helmet, but in no way do the shattered, flattened pieces of Kevlar resemble a helmet.

Dunham died April 15, 2004, when he leapt on a grenade, using his helmet and body to shield his fellow Marines.

For his actions, the 23-year-old Marine who grew up in Scio, N.Y., was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor Dec. 11 by President Bush during a White House ceremony. The Medal of Honor, given for gallantry in action, is the nation's highest decoration.

Yesterday, Dunham's parents visited here to receive the Medal of Honor flag from Gen. Robert Magnus, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, and to thank those who cared for her son. "To the brothers-in-arms who took care of my son: You brought him home," Deb Dunham told the Marines.

Magnus praised the fallen hero yesterday for putting the welfare of his fellow Marines above his own. "In that very short moment, when Corporal Dunham and his Marines saw that grenade rolling free, he gave selflessly of himself his last full measure," Magnus said. "We celebrate the life, the values and the example of Corporal Jason Dunham today and forever more."

Maj. Trent Gibson, Dunham's commanding officer with the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment told Deb and Don Dunham their son did not die in vain. "Yours has been an endless burden, the sacrifice of a son," he said. "That sacrifice has not been in vain."

Gibson talked to Dunham the morning he was killed. "I explained to him that I witnessed his appointment to the title of respected and trusted leader," he said, "a title which I believe cannot be given by one's seniors, but can only be given by one's subordinates."

Then Gibson addressed Corporals Kelly D. Miller and Bill Hampton, the two men Dunham saved when he used his body to absorb the blast.

"I have just a few words of wisdom for you, borrowed from one of my personal heroes, Kilo 3

Bravo Gunnery Sergeant Adam Lockert," he said. "All that we have, has been given to us. What we do with what has been given is how we honor those who gave."

Dunham's extraordinary service honors the Marine Corps, Miller said. "The greatness of his sacrifice is impossible to describe with words," he said. "He gave his life for mine."

Marines paid tribute to Dunham at the National Museum of the Marine Corps here, their first Medal of Honor recipient since Lance Cpl. Miguel Keith received the medal in 1970 for heroism in Vietnam.

"As a symbol of heroism, the Medal of Honor has no equal," Harvey Barnum, retired Marine and Medal of Honor recipient, said. "Inherent in this medal is the power of America, the assurance of a proper destiny, and the promise of her magnanimity."

Dunham's clean-shaven young face now joins the 294 Marine Medal of Honor recipients' portraits displayed in the museum.

Justin Lambert, who grew up playing with Dunham on his father's dairy farm, was on hand for yesterday's ceremony.

Lambert described his boyhood friend as a kid at heart. "Jason told me he loved the kids over there (in Iraq)," he said. "He would give them candy, play soccer with them.

"He really felt like he was making a difference, and he did make a difference," Lambert said.

"What he did was a selfless act. He knew what the consequences were and he did it to protect his guys. That's the way he was."

Source: Multi-National Force-Iraq