

## **The True Meaning of Heroism**

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By Jeff Emanuel

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Jason Dunham, of Scio, NY, is just like any other young American male in his mid-20s, except for this important distinction: he's dead.

But it's not that simple. To be more accurate about Jason – specifically regarding what it is that really makes him different from any other 24-year-old – you must know this additional context: Jason Dunham, a Corporal in the United States Marine Corps, is no longer with us because he gave his life in Iraq for his Marine Corps brothers, as well as for the freedom of every one of us back home. He would have turned 25 Friday -- coincidentally, the 231st birthday of the Marine Corps, and the day before Veterans Day.

Though necessary, it hardly scratches the surface of sufficient repayment to Corporal Dunham, and to his family, that he will be posthumously presented the Congressional Medal of Honor, the nation's highest possible award for military valor, and one which must be directly awarded by the President of the United States.

The Medal, established by Joint Resolution of Congress, is awarded to an Armed Forces member who “distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against any enemy of the United States, while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force.” Corporal Jason Dunham embodies these principles and requirements to a “T.” and the Medal of Honor will be presented to Corporal Dunham's family at an upcoming ceremony at the White House.

What Dunham did to earn this most distinguished of awards is stunning in its selflessness and heroism. According to a brief report of his actions:

On April 14, 2004, Corporal Dunham heroically saved the lives of two of his fellow Marines by jumping on a grenade during an ambush in the town of Karabilah.

When a nearby Marine convoy was ambushed, Corporal Dunham led his squad to

the site of the attack, where he and his men stopped a convoy of cars trying to make an escape. As he moved to search one of the vehicles, an insurgent jumped out and grabbed the corporal by the throat.

The corporal engaged the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. At one point, he shouted to his fellow Marines, "No. No. No. Watch his hand."

Moments later, an enemy grenade rolled out and Corporal Dunham jumped on the grenade to protect his fellow Marines, using his helmet and body to absorb the blast. Corporal Dunham succumbed to his wounds on April 22, 2004.

An amazing sacrifice, and the result of a mindset which is as intrinsic to the mind of the soldier as it is foreign to the mind of the civilian. With this act, as well as with the rest of his actions while in the service – and doubtless before – Jason Dunham displayed the incredible bravery, love, and selflessness which is the very embodiment of the Gospel of John, chapter fifteen, verse thirteen, which says, "Greater love hath no man than this – that he lay down his life for his friends."

This Veterans Day, it is important to remember the sacrifice of men like Corporal Jason Dunham, and to reflect on the fact that America's uniformed services are full of men and women who would gladly give their lives for their comrades, as well as for every man, woman, and child at home.

America's armed forces are made up entirely of volunteers who knew the risks when they joined, and who willingly embrace those risks, their accompanying responsibilities, every day, both to protect their homeland and for the greater good of accomplishing their varying missions throughout the world.

This Veterans Day, take a moment to thank a friend, family member, or total stranger who has served – or is serving – this country, for, while they will never seek the praise or thanks of their fellow man, all will appreciate the gratitude. It is the least that we can do to honor those who have kept us both safe and free for the past 230 years that America has stood strong – and it is largely because of men like Jason Dunham, both in this generation and in future ones, that we shall remain so, despite the attempts of our enemies to the contrary.

I can think of no better way to conclude this piece than by quoting the best post that I have seen on Corporal Dunham to this point. From the milblog "I Love Jet Noise," with regard to a Washington Post article on the Marine hero:

I've been trying to decide what to say about this all morning, but on reflection I think this says it all:

Lance Cpl. Dean told those assembled about a trip to Las Vegas the two men and Becky Jo Dean had taken in January, not long before the battalion left for the Persian Gulf.

Chatting in a hotel room, [Dunham] told his friends he was planning to extend his enlistment and stay in Iraq for the battalion's entire tour. "You're crazy for extending," Lance Cpl. Dean recalls saying. "Why?"

He says Cpl. Dunham responded: "I want to make sure everyone makes it home alive. I want to be sure you go home to your wife alive."

Mission accomplished, Corporal Dunham. Semper Fidelis.

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