

Navy will name ship the USS Jason Dunham

Destroyer honors Iraq War hero from Allegany County

By Jerry Zremski - News Washington Bureau Chief_Updated: 03/21/07 7:17 AM_

WASHINGTON — The legacy of an Iraq War hero from Allegany County will be honored on the high seas for years to come.

Members of Congress announced Tuesday that the U.S. Navy will name its newest guided-missile destroyer the USS Jason Dunham – for the Marine corporal from Scio who threw himself on a grenade to save the lives of his comrades in April 2004.

“We’re basically totally amazed that this happened,” said Deb Dunham, Jason’s mother. “I anticipated that it would be 10 or 20 years before we saw this.”

Indeed, the Navy has a long tradition of naming its ships for war heroes, but it often happens many decades after their death.

For example, in June 2006, the Navy commissioned the USS Farragut, a guided-missile destroyer named for Adm. David Glasgow Farragut, the Civil War hero who coined the phrase: “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!”

Mrs. Dunham said she wasn’t sure how the Navy came to name a ship for her son less than three years after his death. She said the family’s Marine liaison called last week to mention the possibility. “We thought it was very appropriate,” she said.

The naming of the ship will be just the latest accolade accorded to Dunham, who was awarded the Medal of Honor — the nation’s highest military award – by President Bush in January.

Dunham, who was 22 when he died, is being honored again and again because he made the ultimate sacrifice for his comrades.

On April 14, 2004, Dunham was in the town of Husaybah in western Iraq, where his unit responded to an attack on a Marine convoy.

Dunham’s unit stopped several vehicles that were trying to flee the site of the ambush, and an insurgent in one of the vehicles attacked Dunham and pulled out a grenade he had been hiding.

The young Marine immediately jumped on the grenade and was gravely wounded when it exploded. He died 10 days later in Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland, with his parents, Dan and Deb Dunham, at his side.

“Jason Dunham was a true American hero and will always be remembered as such,” said Rep. John R. “Randy” Kuhl Jr., R-Hammondsport, whose district includes Scio. “From naming of the post office in Scio after him last year to the Medal of Honor ceremony in

the White House in January and now the naming of a new Navy destroyer after him, Jason and his heroic, selfless acts will long be remembered.”

Sen. Charles E. Schumer, DN. Y., agreed.

“This high honor is another fitting tribute to his life and humbling heroism,” Schumer said. “I was proud to support his nomination for the Medal of Honor and, on behalf of millions of eternally grateful New Yorkers, I want to personally salute his family.”

The naming of the ship will be officially announced at a ceremony at 1 p.m. Friday in Scio Central High School, which Dunham attended. Navy Secretary Donald Winters will speak at the event, as will Dunham’s mother.

“We’re honored,” she said. “We’re really excited.”

The USS Jason Dunham will be a guided-missile destroyer, a fast warship designed to operate alone or as part of a carrier battle group.

“From what I understand, the ship is still in the process of being built,” Mrs. Dunham said.

And that means Friday’s ceremony probably won’t be the last one held in Jason Dunham’s honor. When the USS Farragut was commissioned, two U.S. senators and top Navy brass attended its commissioning ceremony in Mayport, Fla.