

## **Dunham receives the ultimate honor for the ultimate sacrifice**

By PAUL A. JANNACE/Daily Reporter

WASHINGTON - Marine Cpl. Jason Dunham made the ultimate sacrifice nearly three years ago and Thursday he received the ultimate honor because of it.

President George W. Bush posthumously presented Dunham with the Congressional Medal of Honor Thursday morning to his family in a ceremony in the East Room of The White House in front of several senators, Marines, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Dunham's family.

“The medal is given for gallantry in the face of an enemy attack that is above and beyond the call of duty,” Bush said of this country's highest military decoration.

Bush said Dunham had a natural gift for leadership and “a compassion that allowed him to take others under his wing.”

“The Marine Corps took the best of this man and made him better,” Bush said.

U.S. Navy Captain David Kloak, deputy chaplain of the Marine Corps, gave the invocation to start the ceremony.

“He did something nobly great,” Kloak said. “He wears a Medal of Honor, a Medal of Honor that is worn over the heart.”

Dunham died in April 2004 when an Iraqi insurgent grabbed him by the throat when he went to search the vehicle he was riding in and the insurgent dropped a grenade. Dunham covered the explosion with his Kevlar helmet and body, which absorbed some of the blast.

The Scio native was treated in Germany and transferred to a Bethesda, Md., hospital, where he died eight days after suffering his injuries with his parents by his side.

“On a dusty road in western Iraq, Corporal Dunham gave his own life so that the men under his command might live,” Bush said. “This morning it's my privilege to recognize Corporal Dunham's devotion to the Corps and country.”

The president said Dunham was taught that honor, courage and commitment are not just words, but core values for a way of life that “elevates service above self.”

“Corporal Dunham lived by the values that he had been taught,” Bush said. “He was a guy everybody looked up to. He was a Marine's Marine who led by example.”

The president said Dunham would stop patrols to play street soccer with Iraqi school children and a person who signed on for an extra two months in Iraq to stay with his squad.

“By his selflessness, Corporal Dunham saved the lives of two of his men and showed the world what it means to be a Marine,” Bush said.

The president said Dunham's mother, Deb, calls the Marine Corps her son's “second family” and described her son's relationship with his fellow Marines by saying “Jay was part guardian angel, part big brother, but all Marine.”

“Now it's the Marines who comfort her,” the president said. “Deb has learned a day will not pass without one of Jason's fellow Marines calling to check on her.”

Bush said the Medal of Honor pays tribute to the courage and leadership of a man who represents “the best of young Americans.”

Following the ceremony, Kloak made a closing prayer before the Dunhams met with reporters outside The White House.

“His life is the essence of generosity, sacrifice and courage,” Kloak said.

Deb Dunham said her family is very honored to be in Washington D.C. to receive the Medal of Honor for her son.

“We're honored to be a part of the family of the Marine Corps,” Dunham's mother said. “I've lost my son, but he became a part of history. It still hurts as a parent, but the pride that you have from knowing he did the right thing makes it easier.”

Dunham's father, Dan, said all of those in the military share a part of his son's medal.

“I want them to know that they're a part of this,” said Dan Dunham. “All the military personnel are the greatest people on Earth. It's as much theirs as it is Jason's.”

Dan Dunham said Jason's medal is “an example of the good in man that is still out there.”

After leaving The White House, the Dunhams had lunch with Marines, took a tour of the Marines Memorial and met with New York's Democratic Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Schumer and Clinton pressed for Dunham to be awarded the Medal of Honor and Schumer wrote a letter to the president after his death, recommending Dunham receives the medal.

“Corporal Dunham unflinchingly gave what Lincoln deemed ‘the last full measure of devotion’ and his heroism reflects the true spirit of selflessness, leadership, and courage that the Medal of Honor was established to recognize,” Schumer said. “Corporal Dunham laid down his life by shielding members of his unit from danger by throwing himself on a live grenade, an act of unbelievable bravery and selflessness that saved the lives of at least two fellow Marines.”

Dunham's family was escorted all the way from Scio to Washington D.C. by Marines and again Thursday morning to The White House by Major Trent Gibson, Dunham's company commander, and 1st Lt. Brian Robinson, Dunham's platoon commander.

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

“Today's ceremony was one of the most emotional experiences I've had in my time in Washington, if not my life,” said Rep. John R. “Randy” Kuhl, R-Hammondsport. “The Dunhams are an amazing family and they have been through so much. The East Room of The White House was full of soldiers, sailors, veterans, government officials, and friends and family of the Dunhams including many from Allegany County.”

Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, also met with reporters after the ceremony and said a few words about Dunham.

“It's always a very moving experience,” McCain said. “It reminds us all what is at stake and the sacrifice Americans have made.”

Sen. Catharine Young, R-Olean, said Dunham's family reflects his strength.

“He represents the values that we hold dear in the Southern Tier and everyone is truly grateful for his sacrifice,” Young said.