



Fallen Iraq Marine Awarded Medal Of Honor

WASHINGTON, Jan. 11, 2007

(CBS/AP) At a moving ceremony in the East Room of the White House, President Bush on Thursday made a posthumous presentation of the nation's highest award for valor to Marine Cpl. Jason Dunham. The 24-year-old lost his life two years ago in Iraq during hand-to-hand combat with an insurgent who released a hand grenade.

"Corporal Dunham did not hesitate. He jumped on the grenade, using his helmet and body to absorb the blast," Mr. Bush said.

Dunham's parents accepted the medal on their son's behalf. It's only the second time a Medal of Honor has been bestowed for an act of military gallantry in Iraq, **CBS News White House correspondent Mark Knoller** reports.

Dunham, of Scio, N.Y., saved at least two lives by acting quickly during a struggle with an insurgent near the Syrian border.

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

The presentation was made before a packed crowd that included Dunham's family and dozens of his fellow Marines in their dress uniforms.

Dunham's father and mother said after the ceremony that the honor should be shared with their son's fellow Marines.

"They're all courageous. It's as much theirs as it is Jason's," said Dan Dunham.

"I've lost my son, but he became a part of history," said Dunham's mother, Deb. "It still hurts as a parent, but the pride that you have from knowing he did the right thing makes it easier."

She said Jason's "second family," the Marine Corps, had done everything that could be asked, but acknowledged they still do not have what they all want most.

"I wanted him here, and I didn't have him," said Deb Dunham.

Jason Dunham grew up a popular athlete in the small town of Scio in Alleghany County, where his mother, a home economics teacher, helped teach him spelling by using different words in the basketball game of "horse."

In April 2004, Dunham, 22, received a report that a Marine convoy had been ambushed, according to a Marine Corps account. Dunham led his men to the site near Husaybah, halting a convoy of departing cars. An insurgent in one of the vehicles grabbed him by the throat when he went to search the car and the two fought.

A grenade was dropped, and Dunham covered the explosive with his Kevlar helmet, which, along with his chest armor plate, absorbed some of the blast.

He lived long enough to be transferred to a Bethesda, Md., hospital, where he died with his parents beside him.

Thursday's ceremony was attended by several congressman and senators, including Sen. John McCain, a former Vietnam prisoner of war.

McCain, R-Ariz., said the ceremony was a reminder of the "terribly heartbreaking" sacrifices made by everyday Americans in war.

The Dunhams were to meet later in the day with New York senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton, who had pressed for Dunham to be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

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