

Remarks by
Donald C. Winter
Secretary of the Navy
Hall of Heroes Induction Ceremony for
Master-at-Arms Second Class Michael A. Monsoor
Hall of Heroes, Pentagon
Washington, D.C.
Wednesday, April 9, 2008

Mr. and Mrs. Monsoor, Secretary England, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today in the Hall of Heroes to pay tribute to the life of an American hero.

To stand in this room—surrounded by reminders of greatness, of sacrifice, and of heroism almost beyond comprehension—shakes the soul and stirs the heart.

We see their names.

We read the stories of their deeds.

We stand humbled knowing that few among us could ever live up to the standards they set.

But we are also left with a hunger to know more about the lives they led, the keys to their character, and the secret to their greatness.

Today we have an opportunity to learn about the life of one of those heroes, and to pay tribute to a man who, in dying, showed us how to live.

But Michael Monsoor's inspirational life story is much more than the story of a hero whose last act in life was a decision to sacrifice himself so that others might live.

It is a story about an unusually focused, determined, and disciplined young man who rose to the greatest heights because he lived according to an exacting moral code in all that he did.

He believed in excellence for its own sake, and he believed that the SEAL creed defined the highest values a warrior could embrace.

Those who knew Michael during his formative years saw something special in him, and many suspected that he was destined for greatness.

Michael's family and friends from his hometown of Garden Grove, in Southern California, remember him for his many exceptional qualities as a quiet, fun-loving, adventuresome, and determined boy who dreamed of joining the Navy and becoming a

SEAL.

The key to his character can be found in the love of his parents who raised him, his brothers and sister who encouraged him, and his teachers who guided him during his upbringing.

Their nurturing and support forged a noble spirit of uncommon humility and an instinct to serve his fellow man.

Michael Monsoor had a heart as big and as generous as one can find, enriching the lives of others.

Michael realized his boyhood dream, and nothing could have made him prouder than to serve his country as a member of an elite special operations unit, living according to a code of honor that only the best can achieve.

A universally respected and admired Operator, Michael was known for his quiet stoicism and his willingness to bear extraordinary hardship without complaint -- regardless of the burdens and discomforts that accompany the life of a Navy SEAL.

His unflappable, reassuring manner had a calming effect on all who served with him, and his presence alone buoyed the spirits of his comrades in arms.

He was also known for his exceptionally meticulous nature, and his skill as a heavy weapons gunner.

Whether taking care of a makeshift shelter in the field, or maintaining the weapons and ammunition in his charge, Michael took great pride in his work—down to the smallest detail.

That was the way he lived, on duty and off.

That was the Navy SEAL that was sent to Iraq in April of 2006 to engage the enemy in some of the most dangerous and challenging combat operations imaginable.

Michael's heroism was evident from the beginning of his tour.

Even among a community that routinely downplays its own heroics, and among a group of elite fighters with expectations far above the norm, Michael's conduct stood above the ordinary heroism that our SEAL's exhibit as a matter of course.

On eleven different operations, Michael exposed himself to heavy enemy fire, heedless of the risks, in order to protect his teammates.

In combat, Michael Monsoor was as steady and as cool as they come.

Throughout the length of his deployment to Iraq, from April to September, despite having come under enemy attack on 75 percent of his unit's missions, Michael's dry wit, and his singular smile, never deserted him.

He had a mission to accomplish, and he would not let any obstacles stand in his way.

In May of 2006, Michael earned a Silver Star—and a growing reputation for exceptional cool-headedness under fire—for his brave actions to save a fallen teammate.

Throughout this action and through all 35 firefights during that long, sun-baked spring and summer, Michael proved time and again that when hostilities broke out, he was a SEAL you wanted on your team.

For his sustained, repeated courage under fire, Michael was awarded a Bronze Star.

Those who served with him will remember him always as a consummate professional across many hot and perilous days.

The full extent of Michael's courage, gallantry, and self-less heroism were revealed on the 29th of September, in Ramadi.

Tested once again in the crucible of battle, Michael distinguished himself as a warrior that this Nation will honor in perpetuity.

When Michael and his SEAL teammates were surprised by an enemy grenade, Michael could have escaped and saved himself.

He had a clear path to safety.

But he chose a different path—a path of honor that embodies the way of a Navy SEAL.

For having chosen that path, Petty Officer Michael Monsoor joins the ranks of those who have earned our Nation's highest distinction—the Medal of Honor.

He will be remembered in history for the decision he made to sacrifice his own life so that his SEAL teammates might live.

We cannot know God's purposes.

We can only wonder and reflect on why Michael Monsoor was called home on September 29th, the feast day of Saint Michael, patron saint of warriors.

A man of strong faith, Michael would have known and paid homage to the

passage from Scripture that guided him on that fateful day:

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

Michael Monsoor lived according to this creed.

He loved his family, his brothers in arms, his Nation.

For his deeds, Michael Monsoor now joins the select few honored by our Nation in the Hall of Heroes.

Michael Monsoor was taken from us too soon.

We mourn his loss.

With his passing, a bright, brief flame died in a world to which he brought much light.

But despite this loss, and our sorrow, Michael’s warrior spirit of sacrifice will inspire generations to come, and inspire those who learn about his story to reach for the very best within their souls.

May all of us resolve to be worthy of his sacrifice, and of the sacrifices of all those in combat today.

God bless Michael Monsoor, his family, his fellow SEAL teammates, and may God continue to bless America.

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It is now my great pleasure to introduce our next speaker, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Honorable Gordon England.