

Remarks by Donald C. Winter  
Secretary of the Navy  
Night of Heroes Gala  
Ritz-Carlton Tyson's Corner  
McLean, Virginia  
Wednesday, June 4, 2008

Barney Barnum, Daniel and Debra Dunham, Mr. Scott, Mr. Mitchell, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for asking me to spend an evening among heroes.

It is an honor and a privilege, for the opportunity to do so does not fall to all citizens equally.

I would argue, however, that military families, and those who serve in the military, live lives that cross the path of heroism to an unusual degree.

Many encounter quiet heroism on a daily basis, or see it with their own eyes on the field of battle.

Quiet heroism is the sort of heroism I admire.

It does not boast.

It does not seek the limelight.

It is carried silently, with dignity, and with quiet pride.

It is completely unlike the trappings of those who are often acclaimed as heroes on television and throughout our popular culture.

The celebrity heroism of a professional athlete or a film star is of an entirely different character.

The achievements of such figures are, indeed, impressive.

And society recognizes their accomplishments with riches, fame, and adoring fans.

Critics of American policy and American society who produce documentaries are even considered "heroes" by many in Hollywood.

Such confusion regarding heroism reminds me of one of my favorite quotes from Theodore Roosevelt:

It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the

man who is actually in the arena . . . ; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

Indeed, true heroism is the heroism of the quiet heroes whose feats of valor are performed far from the spotlight, far from loved ones, and far from the comforts of home.

Quiet heroism belongs to the true heroes whose acts of physical courage in the face of mortal dangers, whose sacrifice in support of a noble cause, and whose service on behalf of their fellow citizens inspire Nations.

Tonight we are here to honor the quiet heroism of two heroes—Barney Barnum and Jason Dunham—who, by their actions, remind us all of the kind of true heroes we will always revere, and remind us of what kind of country the sacrifice of heroes has been given to us.

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Our Founding Fathers believed that America was an experiment in human liberty unlike no other in history, and that it held the promise of greatness in her future.

The signers of our Declaration of Independence pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

John Adams, one of the leaders among the Founders, was a serious student of history who understood profoundly at the time that declaring our independence was not enough.

It would have to be won on the battlefield—and defended.

Adams stated at the time:

"I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure that it will cost to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet through all the gloom I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that end is worth more than all the means."

George Washington, who sacrificed so much in uniform in the service of his

young Nation, also understood that our hard-won liberties were not free, and that they imposed a duty on the citizenry.

To leaders such as Washington, it was axiomatic that a citizen's rights had no meaning without responsibilities:

“It may be laid down as a primary position, and the basis of our system, that every Citizen who enjoys the protection of a Free Government, owes not only a proportion of his property, but even of his personal services to the defense of it.”

We have always been blessed, as a Nation, to have had so many patriots step forward in our time of need, to defend America against those who have wished to do us harm.

The American people—whether they realize it or not—depend on quiet heroes to protect the freedom and prosperity they enjoy.

Quiet heroes such as Jason Dunham.

One of Corporal Jason Dunham's fellow Marines, when asked about the loss of his fallen brother in arms, simply stated that:

“God made something special when he made Jason. It was a privilege and honor to know him. It's sad he is gone, but he is living it up in heaven and I'm happy for that.”

That Marine is one of many who is a living testament to the existence of heroism—quiet heroism—in our midst.

It is said that beneath every flag that graces the tombstones of our fallen heroes lies a story.

In many cases, we do not learn the full story until after those heroes are gone.

So much of the time, those heroes are quiet heroes who do not toot their own horn, and it falls to others to tell the world what they have lost.

The Jason Dunham story is now well-known.

Recounted in a best-selling book, and honored by the President in a White House ceremony, Jason Dunham's quiet heroism is now permanently enshrined in the Hall of

Heroes at the Pentagon.

His name will also live on as the namesake of one of our newest destroyers, DDG 109—a singular honor that the United States Navy was proud to bestow.

The events that took place on 14 April 2004 in Anbar province demonstrated that God did, indeed, make something special when He made Jason.

In a hand to hand combat situation, one could not do better than to have a quiet hero like Jason on the team.

Jason faced his moment of truth with conspicuous gallantry, with a single thought—I will save my fellow Marines, whatever the cost.

So Jason used his own body as shield against an enemy grenade, protecting his teammates, and offering them a gift of valor that this Nation will forever honor.

Jason's parents, Daniel and Deborah, are here with us tonight, and I would like to thank them both for raising the quiet hero that will be held up as a source of pride and inspiration for generations to come.

They were responsible for inculcating in Jason the values that shaped his noble character, and for loving and nurturing the boy who grew up to be one of the great heroes of our time.

Daniel and Deborah, the Nation thanks you for all you did to support Jason in his life's work as a United States Marine.

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We are also joined tonight by another great hero, Barney Barnum.

His quiet heroism as a Marine spanned more than 27 years, and included two tours in Vietnam, and a lifetime of distinguished service.

It would be difficult to imagine a more chaotic and hazardous situation when First Lieutenant Barnum's company came under enemy fire on 18 December 1965.

Finding his company commander mortally wounded, his radio operator killed, and casualties all around him, Barney Barnum acted with complete disregard for his own safety.

After making a valiant effort to save his fallen commander, he took charge of the situation and assumed command of the rifle company, comporting himself in a heroic fashion throughout the engagement.

His extraordinary courage on that day was so far above and beyond the call of duty that Barney Barnum received the Medal of Honor.

All those who witnessed his heroism on the battlefield consider it a blessing that their lives were spared, and that Lieutenant Barnum was in their midst when it counted most.

Barney Barnum earned a lifetime of gratitude for his heroism in the jungles of Vietnam.

But he was not yet through serving his Nation.

He had many opportunities to pursue more financially rewarding, less demanding, and more comfortable work after he received the Medal of Honor.

Instead, he remained in his beloved Marine Corps for decades more, and then chose to serve the Nation again in a civilian capacity in various positions within the Department of Defense.

But even his resume does not do justice to his contributions.

Most people who meet Barney do not know his background, his amazing life story.

They know that he is extremely active supporting worthy causes in support of veterans, especially those that help our wounded warriors.

People notice how he has an uncanny ability to relate to those warriors, most of who are 30 and 40 years his junior.

It is only after such encounters, when people learn of Barney's own experience in combat, that it all makes so much sense.

It then becomes abundantly clear why Barney Barnum is a man that everyone respects, and deeply admires.

Barney, thank you for your quiet heroism, and thank you for all your many years of honorable service both in uniform and out as part of the Department of the Navy's team.

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Following in the footsteps of Jason Dunham and Barney Barnum are the quiet heroes that join us tonight as wounded warrior guests.

They understand the meaning of sacrifice, of patriotism, and courage under fire.

They have much to teach us about dignity as they travel the hard road to recovery, with pride in their service to the Nation.

Thank you, for your service and your courage.

The families that raised them, supported throughout their service, and stand by their side now as they recover from their injuries deserve our thanks as well.

Families are so important to the healing process, and their loved ones need their support during this critical period.

Both the families and the wounded warriors should know that we will do right by our recovering warfighters, and that we are committed to giving them the best possible medical care and support as they work to return to their units or reenter civilian life.

Now let us all remember our duties and responsibilities as citizens.

The Foundation's outstanding work in support of our troops is a wonderful example of how citizens can contribute, and support those who serve, in ways large and small.

Thank you for many efforts to support our heroes in uniform, and their families.

As we head home tonight, and think about the significance of this night of heroes, let us reflect on the stirring words of a champion of freedom, Ronald Reagan:

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it on to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free.”

Thank you, and may God bless our heroes, and may God continue to bless America.