

Machinist's Grandson Awarded Medal of Honor

USMC Cpl. Jason L. Dunham didn't have to be in western Iraq on April 14, 2004. He could have finished his military service on schedule several months earlier, returned to his family in upstate New York, or perhaps followed up on an offer to try out with the Arizona Diamondbacks baseball team.

He didn't have to extend his enlistment and he didn't have to accept the responsibilities of squad leader on dangerous foot patrols. And he certainly didn't have to cover an enemy hand grenade with his helmet and then his body to shield his fellow Marines from the blast.

But ask anyone who knew the 22-year old native of Scio, New York, and you're likely to

hear the same thing. "That's the kind of person he was," says Skip Dunham, Jason's grandfather and a charter member of Local 2741 in nearby Hornell, New York. "There were at least five members of his unit in the immediate vicinity of that hand grenade. It may be hard to believe, but I would have been surprised if he had done anything else."

Split-second Decision

For his split-second decision and breathtaking act of courage, Cpl. Jason Dunham became the first U.S. Marine since the Vietnam War to receive the nation's highest award for bravery.

"He was such a natural leader, even as a young man, with something about him that made other kids respect him," explained Skip. "He did not like seeing people mistreated. He loved a good time and had a smile that would light up a room the minute he walked in."

The men of K Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, respected him too, even though they ribbed him for

Local 2741 Trustee Skip Dunham and his wife Linda look through photos and clippings at the local library in Scio, New York, where a reading room was named to honor their grandson, Jason Dunham.



Jason L. Dunham
1981- 2004

extending his enlistment for five months to stay with the squad for the full term of their deployment in Iraq.

"I want to make sure everyone makes it home alive," he told a buddy at the time with uncharacteristic seriousness.

What occurred soon after made it clear just how serious Jason Dunham was.

Dunham's squad was attacked on April 14, 2004, while on a reconnaissance mission in Karabilah, near the Syrian border in western Iraq. Dunham found himself in hand-to-hand combat with an enemy fighter who released a hand grenade as the two of them grappled in the street.

"Watch his hand, watch his hand!" Dunham called out to members of his squad who were rushing to his aid. Just



Grandparents Skip and Linda Dunham at the cemetery in Scio, NY, where Cpl. Jason Dunham was laid to rest. Visitors often leave dog tags and service medals.

seconds before the grenade detonated, Dunham whipped off his helmet, covered the grenade and threw himself on top to smother the blast.

Two members of Dunham's squad were blown off their feet by the explosion, with serious but non-lethal wounds. Incredibly, Dunham survived the initial blast, but succumbed to his wounds eight days later at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD, with his parents Dan and Deb by his side.

Keeping a Promise

"What Jason did that day has nothing to do with politics, but it had everything to do with the kind of person he was," said Dan Dunham. "He made a promise to do what he could to get everyone back safe. He was keeping his promise."

As the story of Jason's deed



spread, honors and tributes followed. In addition to the Medal of Honor, the Navy announced it would name its next destroyer the *USS Jason Dunham* in his honor.

The DDG Arleigh Burke class destroyer will be built at Bath Iron Works (BIW), where IAM members of District 4 will

ensure the craft is worthy of the name it will bear.

Less public, but no less meaningful tributes continue to fill every corner of the Dunham household in Scio. "We've received thousands of letters from people who just wanted to say how moved and sorry they were," said Deb Dunham. "And the Marines from Jason's unit have become family to us. They've been just incredible."

Most meaningful perhaps was the news that a member of Jason's squad recently became a father and another is expecting soon. "Those children might not be here at all if not for what Jason did," said Deb Dunham.

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