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Chairman Presents Awards for Heroism in Iraq

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FORT WAINWRIGHT, Alaska, Feb. 23, 2007 – Marine Gen. Peter Pace presented a Distinguished Service Cross and two Silver Stars here yesterday to three soldiers for heroism displayed in Iraq on Nov. 19, 2005.

Pace, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said it was an emotional moment for him to properly recognize the soldiers' heroism, and "to say thank you for their incredible valor in the face of a very, very dangerous enemy."

Pace awarded the Distinguished Service Cross to Army Pvt. Stephen C. Sanford of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment, for displaying extraordinary courage during the evacuation of casualties from a home in Mosul while under intense enemy fire, according to Army officials.

Although shot in the leg during his squad's initial assault attempt, he still accompanied his squad during its second assault. Once inside the house, Sanford provided a heavy volume of suppressive fire while the casualties were evacuated. He continued to engage the enemy while escorting wounded soldiers from the house, according to the award citation.



Pvt. Stephen C. Sanford, recently medically retired from the Army, salutes Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after being awarded the Distinguished Service Cross at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 22. Sanford received the award for going above and beyond the call of duty while fighting terrorist in Iraq. Photo by Staff Sgt. D. Myles Cullen, USAF

Sanford returned to the house a second time to provide covering fire for the final withdrawal of casualties. When the last soldier leaving the house was shot in the neck, Sanford began performing CPR. Sanford was shot twice more in the back while trying to revive the other soldier. He returned fire and killed an insurgent while receiving two more potentially fatal gunshot wounds, the citation stated. He continued returning fire while helping his wounded comrade until he was incapacitated by his own loss of blood.

The chairman awarded a Silver Star to Staff Sgt. Michael L. Barrera Jr., and to Pfc. Joshua V. Joseph, both of 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment, 172nd Brigade Combat Team, for heroism

and selfless service. Army officials said their courage and disregard for their own welfare resulted in saving the lives of comrades who were severely wounded.

After pinning on the three medals, Pace called the three soldiers back to stand by him in front of a “wall of heroes,” displaying photos of the 30 soldiers in their unit who have died in Iraq.

“I have had the distinct honor of participating in many award ceremonies,” Pace told the audience of family, friends and fellow soldiers. “This is the first time I have ever had the honor of awarding a Distinguished Service Cross. It’s certainly the first time I’ve ever had in one ceremony the honor of putting two Silver Star Medals on two very deserving soldiers.”

The chairman said each of the soldiers would probably say they don’t think they deserve the awards. “If you asked them, they’d say they were doing their jobs,” he said. “But if you asked their fellow soldiers, they’d say they went above and beyond the call of duty.

“The soldiers on the wall behind me know what you have done,” Pace told the award recipients. “Your courage in combat made a difference. You deserve these awards.”

When read in a citation, Pace said, words like “extraordinary heroism” and “gallantry in action” don’t capture what really happened that day. “But you know what happened, and so do your fellow soldiers in the unit,” he said.

“Thank you for doing what soldiers have always done in combat -- to serve, to serve well and to serve above and beyond what any of our fellow citizens would ask you to serve,” he concluded.



Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, awards the Silver Star to Army Staff Sgt. Michael Barrera at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 22. Photo by Staff Sgt. D. Myles Cullen, USAF



The Distinguished Service Cross for Army Pvt. Stephen C. Sanford, and Silver Star Medals for Army Staff Sgt. Michael Barrera and Army Pvt. Joshua Joseph are prepared for presentation at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 22. Photo by Staff Sgt. D. Myles Cullen, USAF



Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, awards the Distinguished Service Cross to Army Pvt. Stephen C. Sanford, and the Silver Star Medal to Army Staff Sgt. Michael Barrera and Army Pvt. Joshua Joseph at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 22. Photo by Staff Sgt. D. Myles Cullen, USAF



Army Pvt. Joshua Joseph introduces his fiancée to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine Gen. Peter Pace, prior to ceremony in which Joseph received the Silver Star Medal at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 22. Defense Dept photo by Staff Sgt. D. Myles Cullen, USAF