

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Navy Cross & Bronze Star Ceremony
Camp Lejeune, NC
1 November 2013

I want to thank you all for having me here to participate in this ceremony this afternoon. It is especially an honor to be here to welcome this group of Marines back home after another hard long deployment in Afghanistan. The incredible work of this battalion, in two deployments over the last 3 years, is a testament to the honor, courage, and commitment of the Corps.

I'd also want to particularly thank the families who have join us today. I had a chance to meet with the families of the awardees before this ceremony. The service and sacrifice of our military families is something we must never stop recognizing. You are the foundation that our service to this nation is built on. So, on a very personal level, thank you not only for being here but for all that you do every day for your Marines, and through them for our country.

I realize that there's a pretty good chance that this ceremony is all that stands between you and your post deployment leave. We'll keep this short and to the point.

For over 200 years I and my predecessors as Secretary of the Navy have had the honor of being responsible for both the Navy and the Marine Corps. This morning I was at Parris Island for Boot Camp graduation and in a few weeks I will be headed back to Afghanistan for my 12th trip to visit Marines in-country. From our newest recruits to these combat veterans, you are writing another chapter in the long, inspiring history of the Marine Corps. Helmand Province will join names like Tripoli, Belleau Wood, Tarawa, Pelilleu, Guadalcanal, Chosin, Hue and Fallujah.

The job that you have done and continue to do every day while you are deployed includes actions and events most of our fellow countrymen cannot even imagine.

Your missions rarely make the news and much of the time your stories are known only to you, your comrades in arms, and your leadership. I am particularly grateful today to be able to publicly recognize the heroics of these Marines and all Marines and your brothers in arms from Second Battalion, Eighth Marines.

Today we are here to honor both your deployments in 2011 and 2013. In 2011 you played a central role in the fighting in Helmand Province. From Marjah to Sangin, Combat Outpost Hanson to Patrol Base Dakota, you conducted daily counter-insurgency and security assistance missions. We salute your eight brothers in arms who were lost during that deployment, and their memory abides with you in all that you do.

It was in fighting near Patrol Base Dakota that Sergeant Joshua Moore, who was then a Lance Corporal on his first deployment, served as Assistant Team Leader and Scout for a Scout/Sniper element. When his team was attacked by a large squad of enemy fighters a pair of grenades sailed over the wall he was using for cover. Without thinking, Sergeant Moore picked up one of the grenades and threw it back. When the other grenade failed to go off, he then went on the attack himself. With three Marines already severely wounded, he stepped into the open and returned fire with his M4 and grenade launcher. Standing his ground as enemy fire poured in around him, his unrelenting attack drove the enemy into retreat.

But as you all know, as everyone knows, combat is not an individual event. Sergeant Justin Tygart, the Team Leader, was wounded but continued to return fire. As the enemy retreated Corporal Adams helped pull the team behind cover and Corporal Gaven Eier began administering lifesaving medical aid to treat Sergeant Tygart and Corporal Elias's wounds. While his wounds were being treated, Sergeant Tygart continued to direct his Marines and provide leadership until he was evacuated. Sergeant Ritchie Elias worked through his pain as his shrapnel wounds were treated and called in the urgent requests for medical evacuation and the quick reaction force.

With an unknown enemy around them, Sergeant Moore went to search out a Landing Zone for the helicopters to evacuate his comrades. He secured the area until the MEDEVAC helicopter and Quick Reaction Force arrived. For these actions I am very proud to present Sergeant Moore with the Navy Cross, the highest decoration that we can give in the Department of the Navy, and something he will share with Marines like Chesty Puller and John Ripley.

Today we also award the Bronze Star with combat distinguishing device to Sergeant Justin Tygart, and the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with combat distinguishing device to Sergeant Ritchie Elias and Corporal Gaven Eier, for their leadership and their skill and their heroism in the fighting during Operation GHILLIE STRIKE III.

These actions inspire us. In the more than four and a half years I have served as Secretary, it has been my privilege to present over a dozen Navy Crosses. Although every single recipient earned the recognition for exhibiting great heroism and astounding personal sacrifice, when asked, these

Marines and Sailors always say the same thing about what they did: “I was just doing my job.” Today’s awardees all said the same thing about their actions in 2011.

For Second Battalion, Eighth Marines, your work in Afghanistan showed the core values of the United States Marine Corps. Every Marine who made these deployments showed the dedication and the skill for which you are famous. On your deployment this year you worked towards turning over security and responsibility to our Afghan partners. Conducting operations, patrolling with partner units, and even eventually closing down Forward Operating Base Geronimo and Combat Outpost Payne, you achieved so much. While some of your missions between 2011 and 2013 had changed, one thing that did not change was the heroism of this Battalion did not. In particular I want to recognize Corporal Eier again, who was injured by an IED while operating in support of one of FOX Company’s missions on this second deployment. Gaven is still facing more surgery from the injury to his left leg but he is here with us today as a recent example of the Marines who have given to their nation in blood.

So in two combat deployments in three years, these individual acts of heroism we recognize today are just illustrations of the everyday selflessness that you demonstrate. It is a remarkable thing; most of you who are here today in a time of war walked into a recruiter’s office in a time and said “send me.” This generation of Marines, and of our Sailors, like the generations who have come before them, are an extraordinary group of men and women who have given so much to our country, so much to all of us. You are the lifeblood, the legacy, and the history that is the United States Marine Corps.

It is appropriate that today we recognize these individuals for their outstanding actions in the face of incredible danger. It is also appropriate, that by honoring these four men, we honor the rest of you who fought beside them, and those who are still in the fight.

Thank you, and Semper Fideles.