

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Navy Cross Presentation for Cpl. Michael Ouellette
Londonderry, NH
Wednesday, 10 November, 2010

Donna Ouellette, Len Ouellette, Stephanie and Allen, on behalf of a very grateful nation, please accept my solemn condolences for your loss and our thanks for what your son - your brother - did for our country and for his fellow Marines.

Every so often, that heroism comes along that is so profound that it really defies the ability of those who try to describe it later - what the true nature of the action is in any sort of words. We are here today to honor one of those actions and to present the Navy Cross to Michael Ouellette. We are here today to honor the memory of Corporal Michael Ouellette.

His mom said that he was "Michael" only when he really got in trouble. And if it was serious, it was Michael Webster.

We're here today to remember Michael Ouellette, a Marine who, in the true spirit of the Corps, gave his life to make sure that his Marines were safe.

On March 22nd, 2009, Corporal Ouellette, a combat veteran of a tour in Ramadi, Iraq, and on deployment with the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, led his squad, the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, on a combat patrol in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

An ambush came. It opened when an IED exploded next to Michael Ouellette. Critically wounded, his first thoughts were not of himself or how badly he was hurt, but for his fellow Marines. Despite the pain he was in, he organized his squad's defenses. He called for and he directed close air support, and he arranged for reinforcements to come to the aid of the squad. And when relief came, he refused to be evacuated until all his Marines were accounted for. During that evacuation, Michael Ouellette died.

Thirty seconds. Thirty seconds just then to describe heroism. Thirty seconds to sum up the action that saved so many lives and epitomized the bravery of an individual Marine.

What words cannot describe is the event itself – what the land looked like, what the air smelled like, what the heat of combat felt like, or what the emotions were for those who were there. In the midst of the chaos, the confusion, the fight, Michael Ouellette did what he had to do to keep his Marines safe.

What this description also fails to do is talk about the character of the life of Michael Ouellette himself. He grew up right here in this part of New Hampshire and was raised by his mom to always do the right thing. Ouellette left after high school, and fell in love with New Orleans and cooking. Went to cooking school, learned how to cook. And then because he

always wanted to, and thought it was the right thing to do, he joined the United States Marine Corps.

Loved by his squad mates, most of whom are here today to remember their friend; history books will remember Corporal Michael Ouellette for what he did in Afghanistan for his Marines and for all of us. But for his friends and family, they remember a lot more of how he lived his life.

Today is the Corps' 235th birthday. All across the country and all around the world, Marines are rightly celebrating the proud history and proud traditions.

I think it's very appropriate that this ceremony today occurs on that birthday and that we come together because of the heroism of one Marine. Because throughout the history of the Marine Corps - throughout all the victorious battles that have been fought, through the evolution of the Corps' role, from the sharpshooters in the riggings of our first ships, the proud amphibious force of the Second World War and the desert and mountain warriors of today - through all that, the Corps has been and always will be defined by its people, by the individual warrior.

It's the dedication of you, the loyalty to squad mates and comrades, the unrelenting courage of every individual Marine that has made the Marine Corps what it is today – the most professional fighting force that the world has ever seen.

Corporal Michael Ouellette, as a Marine, represents those countless Marines who've served our nation since the birth of the republic, from Nassau to Now Zad. His name now shares that high place of honor with every other hero of the Marine Corps. Like so many of those who went before him, his sacrifice was made so that freedom would endure and America would remain secure.

I'm going to close as I started. Donna Ouellette, thank you for the son that you raised. Thank you for the man, the Marine that he was. And if I may borrow the words of someone far more eloquent than I:

“I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.”

Thank you. Semper fidelis.