

Remarks by the Secretary of the Navy  
Ray Mabus  
Navy Cross & Silver Star ceremony  
03 December 2012

General Clark, thank you so much. I am extraordinarily pleased to be here today to honor these four men for their heroic actions in the Nahr-e-Saraj District of Helmand Province in July 2010. I particularly also want to recognize the family members that are here. I am not sure there's anybody left in Massachusetts with Sergeant Soutra bringing his whole family out. But, getting the chance to meet the family members of these four and of MARSOC members is one of the special honors I have. But in honoring these four men, we are also honoring all those with whom they served.

In the more than three and a half years I have served as Secretary, it has been my privilege to award twelve Navy Crosses. Although each recipient earned the recognition for

exhibiting great heroism and astounding personal sacrifice, when asked, these incredible Sailors and Marines always say the same thing about what they did: “I was just doing my job.”

But the job of our special operations forces, like those we honor here today, include actions and events most of us who are not a member of this community cannot even imagine. Their missions are often highly classified, and while, in some pretty rare cases their action makes the news, most of the time their stories are known only to each other and their leadership, and are never repeated in public. I am particularly grateful today to have this opportunity to publicly recognize the heroics of these four and all their brothers in arms who serve with them.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of July, 2010, members of 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Special Operations Battalion, MARSOC, were partnered with 90 Afghan Commandos to secure some hotly contested territory in the vicinity of the village of Heyderabad. Shortly after landing under the cover of darkness, they came under a sustained attack from the enemy which lasted more than 24 hours. Each one that we recognize today joined by the entire team that went in on that day were crucial in that intense fight during which the enemy forces were decisively defeated.

Early on that Sunday, the 11th, as the sun was rising and at the height of the engagement, an IED blast mortally wounded Staff Sergeant Christopher Antonik and effectively pinned the entire element in a kill zone as they attempted to maneuver to higher ground.

Captain James Rose, having observed the IED blast and the ensuing fight, pulled together a Quick Reaction Force and attacked the enemy to draw their fire away from the wounded. Repeatedly exposing himself to enemy fire, his aggressive

actions allowed Corpsman First Class Petty Officer Patrick Quill to reach Staff Sergeant Antonik.

Without regard for his own personal safety, Doc Quill ran across 150 meters of completely exposed terrain. Shielding the Staff Sergeant with his body from the incoming fire, he started aid and then dragged him more than 75 meters to cover.

Throughout this whole time, even as he treated and evacuated the wounded, Doc Quill continued to return accurate and deadly fire on the enemy.

The Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) Staff Sergeant Frankie Shinost expertly directed machine gun fire and

rockets from aircraft against enemy fighters, ultimately destroying them.

The bravery shown by Captain Rose, Petty Officer Quill and Staff Sergeant Shinost saved the lives of both Afghans and Marines—sons and fathers, brothers, uncles and friends -- who returned home to family and to loved ones.

Captain Rose, Petty Officer Quill and Staff Sergeant Shinost also fulfilled the most sacred role, that of never leaving a Marine behind, as they rendered treatment and evacuated their fallen. In doing so, they allowed families and loved ones here at home, to

honor those like Staff Sergeant Antonik, who gave his last full measure of devotion in service to his country.

And I want to make a special mention of Staff Sergeant Antonik and his family. While we present these awards to those who tried to save him, we also recognize his family's terrible loss.

So, it is altogether fitting that Captain Ross, Petty Officer Quill and Staff Sergeant Shinost each receive the Silver Star – awarded for gallantry in action against an enemy of our nation.

Sergeant William Soutra, that day, knew his role the moment Staff Sergeant Antonik was hit. As the assistant element leader, he stepped forward to lead. Although he was exposed to incoming enemy fire, Sergeant Soutra took charge and moved down the line to orient the Afghan Commando force with their fire toward the main enemy position.

Without an interpreter, he moved systematically from man to man of the Afghans, physically re-positioning them toward the enemy and motioning for them to fire accurately at a sustained rate. Ignoring the incoming rounds, he moved more than 150 meters through some withering fire to reach the wounded and help pull them to a covered position. All the while, he relayed information on the enemy to orient fixed and rotary wing air support, and he relentlessly engaged hostile positions with his M4 even as he coordinated the evacuation and helped carry casualties through the continuing gunfire.

Nearly 70 minutes after the initial blast, Sergeant Soutra led the platoon safely out of the line of fire; his military working dog still by his side. Sergeant Soutra proved himself to be an extremely gifted combat leader, both in his primary duty as a Canine Handler and as a combat advisor to the Afghan Commandos. His heroic and his selfless actions under fire and his willingness to take charge were an inspiration to those serving with him.

For those actions, I am honored to award Sergeant Soutra the Navy Cross, the highest decoration that is bestowed by the Department of the Navy. Sergeant Soutra's actions during this fight were extraordinary and they turned the tide of this ambush, ultimately saving lives of his fellow Marines, Sailors and Afghan commandos.

It is appropriate that today we recognize these individuals for their outstanding actions in the face of extreme danger. It is also appropriate, that by honoring these men, we honor those who fought beside them. I have made ten trips to Afghanistan as Secretary and know first hand that all Marines and Sailors who deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq over the past more than a decade deserve our recognition and our gratitude.

They, along with the hundreds of thousands of family members, have defined a generation, they have epitomized an ethos, they have upheld and added to the heritage that is our Marine Corps. It is a heritage that for 237 years has safeguarded America.

*Semper Fidelis.*