

Sergeant Scott Montoya, USMCR; A True “Blue Diamond” Hero

By Nicholas Warr



Sgt Scott Montoya with President George Bush

As most veterans know, true heroes are very rare. Consider Lt. Gen. Chesty Puller, who during his legendary career earned the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Service Cross, and numerous other awards; and U. S. Navy Chaplain Father Vincent Capodanno, who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor; and Lt. General Martin L. Brandtner, who earned two Navy Crosses out in The Arizona during his second tour in the Republic of Vietnam; these true heroes don't come along every day.

One of the great benefits of being a member of the 1st Marine Division Association since I joined 23 years ago is that I have had the wonderful

opportunity to meet and talk with some true American heroes – those who demonstrated amazing courage under fire, who saved lives and whose acts turned the tide of battle, resulting in victory and a new chapter in our beloved Corps' legacy.

I'll never forget the day that I first met Colonel Mitch Paige, USMC (MOH). I was attending an FMDA Anniversary celebration many years ago at Camp Pendleton. It was a rather dreary day with a light but persistent rain falling on those of us who had participated in and observed our annual "Rededication of Colors" ceremony at 1st Marine Division Headquarters. I had invited my son, Brent, and we were both soaking wet, so we ducked into the Quonset hut behind the White House where I knew there was a historical display of various artifacts displaying some of the legendary history of our division. As I began to show him around, I noticed that Mitch Paige was also in the Quonset hut, so I introduced my son to him. After a brief conversation, Mitch asked Brent if he would like to walk around the museum with him, so he could expand on the displays surrounding us. Brent was in awe of this kind, soft-spoken man who was wearing the beautiful starred blue and white decoration, proof of the fact that we were in the presence of a true hero, and so was I. I'll never forget his kindness that day, and the humility that Colonel Paige demonstrated. It capped off a very memorable day for all of us.

I also remember the honor I felt every time I was in the presence of Gunnery Sergeant Denny Weisgerber, USMC (Ret) as we worked together within the 1st Marine Division Association. Denny was also a living legend to all of us who knew him and worked with him. Awarded the Navy Cross for his heroic actions in Korea in 1952, Denny worked tirelessly for many decades on our behalf. I will never forget his booming yet somehow gentle voice as he served as our Master of Ceremonies at many Blue Diamond functions and USMC Birthday Balls over the years.

Once I accepted the responsibilities to become the FMDA's Deputy Vice President – West, the first thing I did was reach out to all the Chapter Presidents in the Western Region. When I reached the Chapter President of our Orange County Chapter, Sergeant Scott Montoya, I quickly became impressed with his youthful enthusiasm and immediately knew that our Orange County Marines had great

leadership. That feeling was confirmed after our first conversation, during which Scott shared with me that their chapter was very active, hosting well-attended monthly meetings and four functions every year. They host a chapter picnic, a special luau, a Marine Corps Birthday celebration, and they are very active in the Toys for Tots program. Their meetings are full of “interesting stuff,” and light on “administrative crap” as Scott energetically enlightened me. Their biggest challenge is retention of membership and recruitment of new members, which is the issue that I have found to be uppermost on the minds of our chapters and our national association.

I was so intrigued by our first conversation that I decided to learn more about Sgt. Scott Montoya. I found that Scott had been working as a Deputy Sheriff in the Orange County Sheriff’s Department for over four years when he came to the decision to enlist in the United States Marine Corps at age 25. He had observed that many of his fellow deputies had served time in our Corps, and he was very impressed by their love of the Corps and the Esprit de Corps they displayed every day. Scott graduated from boot camp at MCRD San Diego and excelled at every assignment he was given. He was the honor graduate of the School of Infantry and spent two and a half years as a squad automatic weapons gunner. He excelled at the elite Scout Sniper School, and he became a martial arts instructor and trainer.

Scott eventually changed his status as that of Marine reservist and went back to work as a deputy sheriff. Three weeks after the devastating terrorist attacks on 9/11, his reserve unit was activated. During the build-up of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Scott was deployed with the Scout Sniper Platoon, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marines, who were attached to the 1st Marine Division. His unit was on point for the invasion of Iraq, under the leadership of (then) Major General James N. Mattis.

As the Marines pressed toward Baghdad, Scott and his fellow Marines found themselves in a ferocious firefight in Sadr City, which was considered a stronghold for Saddam Hussein’s vaunted Iraqi Republican Army. To say the least, his actions during that hellacious battle saved lives and made a huge difference for his fellow Marines, but also many innocent Iraqi civilians who found themselves in harm’s

way. Scott's Navy Cross Citation speaks for itself, but it does not contain the full story. Here's a link to the citation: <https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/3638>

I have recently learned from several of Scott's business associates and friends that there is an effort underway to have his award upgraded to the Medal of Honor. After reading his citation and learning more about what happened that day and understanding the full story of Scott's undaunted courage under fire, I am joining that effort to see that he receives the recognition he deserves.

After serving another five years in the Orange County Sheriff's department, Scott decided to change his focus and launched a non-profit veterans' service organization to help him and his partners do what they can do to assist disabled veterans. It's called Faithful Service for Veterans, and their mission is to pair dogs with disabled veterans. You can check out this wonderful program here: <https://faithfultserviceforveterans.org/>

Imagine my joy at realizing that I was once again in the presence of a true Blue Diamond hero as I was speaking with Sergeant Scott Montoya, USMCR (Navy Cross). I look forward to meeting him in person at our next FMDA function and to working with him and our Orange County Chapter as we work toward the goals of financial stability, increased membership and renewed focus for the 1st Marine Division Association.

Stay tuned for the rest of Scott's story, which will be published in the next issue of The Old Breed News.

Semper Fidelis!