

For Immediate Release: *June 17, 2009*

Washington DC - Late last evening, the House Armed Services Committee accepted an amendment offered by Congressman Duncan Hunter requiring the Secretary of Defense to review the Medal of Honor awards process. Since the start of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, there has not been a single living recipient of the Medal of Honor.

Earlier this year, Congressman Hunter wrote to President Obama regarding the lack of living Medal of Honor recipients and the inconsistent criteria for determining award winners. Hunter specifically raised the circumstances surrounding Marine Corps Sergeant Rafael Peralta, who suppressed a grenade blast with his body and was killed during fighting in Iraq. Sergeant Peralta's Medal of Honor nomination was downgraded to the Navy Cross after a review by an independent panel that consisted of two pathologists and a neurosurgeon.

The response to that letter, written by Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Gail McGinn, suggested that electronic warfare may be the reason why only five U.S. troops - all of whom were killed during combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan -- have been awarded the Medal of Honor. McGinn wrote, "Technological advancements have dramatically changed battlefield tactics, techniques and procedures. Precision-guided, stand-off weapons allow our forces to destroy known enemy positions with reduced personnel risk."

Hunter responded to that reasoning by saying, "It's true that some aspects of warfare have changed, but what hasn't changed is the close-quarter combat that is required to take ground from the enemy. That is what our Marines and soldiers do. Those actions are no different today than they were at any other time before.

"The lack of Medal of Honor awards in Iraq and Afghanistan suggest that either troops are not as brave as they used to be, which I don't believe is true, or someone has to die in order to receive this honor. And even then, particularly in the case of Sergeant Peralta, the process for determining award winners appears to be inconsistent."

Hunter's amendment directs the Secretary of Defense to review whether acts of valor that

traditionally merit the Medal of Honor are being downgraded or award criteria has been subjectively raised to favor actions that only result in death. The Secretary of Defense is then required to report to Congress.

The Fiscal Year 2010 Defense Authorization Act now awaits consideration by the full House.