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NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 8.

Remarks on Presenting Posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor to Petty Officer Michael A. Monsoor

April 8, 2008

Good afternoon, and welcome.

The Medal of Honor is America's highest decoration for military valor. Over the years, many who have received the medal have given their lives in the action that earned it. The name of Petty Officer Michael Anthony Monsoor will now be among them.

September 2006, Michael laid down his life for his brothers in arms. Today we remember the life of this faithful Navy SEAL. And on behalf of a grateful nation, we will present Michael Monsoor's family with the Medal of Honor that he earned.

I welcome the Vice President. Secretary of Defense Gates, thank you for coming; Secretary of Veterans Affairs Peake; Secretary Don Winter of the Navy; Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and wife, Deborah; General James Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and Annette; Admiral Gary Roughead, Chief of Naval Operations, and wife, Ellen; Senator John McCain; Congressman Ed Royce; Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez.

Previous Medal of Honor recipients, thank you for joining us.

I appreciate Chaplain Burt, Navy SEALs—the finest warriors on the face of the Earth, the Monsoor family, and everybody else.

The Medal of Honor is awarded for an act of such courage that no one could rightly be expected to undertake it. Yet those who knew Michael Monsoor were not surprised when he did. The son of Orange County, California, grew up in a family where helping others was a way of life. Mike's father was a marine; his mother, a social worker. Together they raised their four children to understand the meaning of service and sacrifice.

From a very early age, Mike showed the strength of his own convictions. Apparently going to kindergarten wasn't one of them. Mike had no complaints after the first week of school, until someone broke the news to him that he had to go back the next week. [*Laughter*] Many mornings, Mike refused to put on the nice clothes for school. Instead, he insisted on wearing mismatched outfits. Mike's mother soon discovered there was no stopping the determined young boy from mixing plaids and stripes. And years later, there would be no stopping an even more determined young man from donning a uniform of navy blue.

In some ways, Mike was an unlikely candidate for the Navy. He suffered from terrible asthma as a child. On some nights, his coughing fits would land him in the hospital. But Mike would not lay low for long. He strengthened his lungs by racing his siblings in the swimming pool. He worked to wean himself off his inhaler. He built himself into a superb athlete, excelling from sports like football to snowboarding.

After enlisting in the Navy, he began preparing for the ultimate test of physical endurance: SEAL training. Less than a third of those who begin this training become SEALs. But Mike would not be denied a spot. In September 2004, he earned the right to wear the Navy SEAL trident.

The newly minted frogman became a beloved member of the SEAL team community. His teammates liked to laugh about the way his shiny Corvette would leave everybody in the dust. But deep down, they always knew Mike would never leave anybody behind when it counted. He earned their confidence with his attention to detail and quiet work ethic. One of Mike's officers remembers an instructor once asking after an intense training session, quote, "What's the deal with the Monsoor guy? He just says, 'Roger that,' to everything."

When Mike deployed with his team to Ramadi in the spring of 2006, he brought that attitude with him. Because he served as both a heavy machine gunner and a communications operator, he often had a double load of equipment, sometimes more than 100 pounds worth. But under the glare of the hot desert sun, he never lost his cool.

At the time, Ramadi was in the clutches of Al Qaida terrorists and insurgents. Together the SEALs and the Army 1st Battalion of the 506 Infantry Regiment took the offense against the enemy. The SEALs carried out a broad range of special operations, including providing sniper cover in tough urban conditions and conducting raids against terrorists and insurgents. Overall, Mike's platoon came under enemy attack during 75 percent of their missions. And in most of these engagements, Mike was out front defending his brothers.

In May 2006, Mike and another SEAL ran into the line of fire to save a wounded teammate. With bullets flying all around them, Mike returned fire with one hand while helping pull the injured man to safety with the other. In a dream about the incident months later, the wounded SEAL envisioned Mike coming to the rescue with wings on his shoulders.

On Saint Michael's Day, September 29, 2006, Michael Monsoor would make the ultimate sacrifice. Mike and two teammates had taken position on the outcropping of a rooftop when an insurgent grenade bounced off Mike's chest and landed on the roof. Mike had a clear chance to escape, but he realized that the other two SEALs did not. In that terrible moment, he had two options: to save himself or to save his friends. For Mike, this was no choice at all. He threw himself onto the grenade, and absorbed the blast with his body. One of the survivors puts it this way: "Mikey looked death in the face that day and said, 'You cannot take my brothers. I will go in their stead.' "

Perhaps the greatest tributes to Mike's life is the way different service members all across the world responded to his death. Army soldiers in Ramadi hosted a memorial service for the valiant man who had fought beside them. Iraqi Army scouts, whom Mike helped train, lowered their flag and sent it to his parents. Nearly every SEAL on the west coast turned out for Mike's funeral in California. As the SEALs filed past the casket, they removed their golden tridents from their uniforms, pressed them onto the walls of the coffin. The procession went on nearly half an hour. And when it was all over, the simple wooden coffin had become a gold-plated memorial to a hero who will never be forgotten.

For his valor, Michael Monsoor becomes the fourth Medal of Honor recipient in the war on terror. Like the three men who came before him, Mike left us far too early. But time will not diminish his legacy. We see his legacy in the SEALs whose lives he saved. We see his legacy in the city of Ramadi, which has gone from one of the most dangerous places in Iraq to one of the most safest. We see his legacy in the family that stands before us filled with grief, but also with everlasting pride.

Mr. and Mrs. Monsoor: America owes you a debt that can never be repaid. This Nation will always cherish the memory of your son. We will not let his life go in vain. And this Nation will always honor the sacrifice he made. May God comfort you. May God bless America.

Come on up. And now George and Sally Monsoor will be here—a Military Aide will read the citation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:07 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rear Adm. Robert F. Burt, USN, Chief of Navy Chaplains. Following the President's remarks, Lt. Col. Gina C. Humble, USAF, Air Force Aide to the President, read the citation.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Afghanistan Provincial Governors

April 8, 2008

I've just had a fascinating opportunity to discuss Afghanistan with eight Governors. I started off the meeting by telling them I was a Governor once. And I—and they were then telling me their stories, their concerns. First of all, they universally thanked the American people for standing with them as this new democracy takes hold.

Secondly, there's concerns about unemployment, about economic development. Some Provinces are quiet. And the Governor wondered whether or not, because it's quiet, people remember the people in the Province exist. Other Provinces have got some difficult security problems.

They shared with me very candidly their concerns about different types of operations,