

*Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019*

**Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor to Staff Sergeant David G. Bellavia**  
*June 25, 2019*

*The President.* Thank you very much. Please. Thank you, Chaplain, very much. That's really beautiful.

Today it's my privilege to award the highest military honor to an American soldier who demonstrated exceptional courage to protect his men and defend our Nation. Will you please join me in welcoming Staff Sergeant David Bellavia? David, thank you. David is the first living recipient to earn the congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery in the Iraq war.

And we're honored to have with us distinguished leaders of our military. I want to recognize Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense David Norquist. David, thank you very much. And congratulations. Acting Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy. Come here, Ryan. Let me just say hello to you. *[Laughter]* Congratulations. It just happened yesterday, so I have to congratulate. Congratulations. Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Paul Selva. Thank you, Paul. Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley. Hi, Mark. And Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel Dailey. Thank you, Daniel, very much.

Thanks as well to Members of Congress who join us: Representative Liz Cheney. Thanks, Liz. Chris Collins. Thanks, Chris. Dan Crenshaw. Tom Reed. Thank you. Thank you, Tom. I see you over there, Tom.

*Representative Thomas W. Reed II. [Inaudible]*—Mr. President.

*The President.* Thank you very much.

Joining David for this special ceremony is his wife Deanna and three children Evan, Ayden, and Vivienne, along with his mother Marilyn, and his brothers Daniel and Rand. I want to thank you all for being here. A very special day for you and for all of us. For the Nation, actually. Thank you.

David's father William passed away in 2017. And though he's no longer with us, we know that today he must be one of those proud dads. He's looking down upon us from Heaven, and he's very proud of his son and his son's family. I have to say that. Thank you, David.

Finally, we are gratified to be joined by eight previous Medal of Honor recipients. And, I have to tell you, I've got to know just about all of them. You are forever with us. You inspire us. You are truly brave, great people. Thank you very much for being here. Brave people. Thank you.

David grew up in Western New York. He was the youngest of four children. As a boy, he would listen to stories from his grandfather, a World War II veteran and hero in his own right, who earned a Bronze Star in the Normandy campaign. I just came back from Normandy. That was something.

As David remembers, his grandfather's stories were always "vivid with a source of pride." And they were delivered very beautifully. There was a nobility and purpose in the infantry. And David saw that a very young age. "I wanted to be what my grandfather was," David would often say. "I wanted to be part of this noble adventure." Is that right? That's a pretty good quote, would you say? Better say "yes"; otherwise, I have a problem. *[Laughter]*

In 1999, David followed the example of his grandfather and joined the United States Army infantry. Several months after the September 11 attack on our Nation, David deployed, saying goodbye to his wife and his son Evan. He served in Germany, Kosovo, and then in Iraq.

In November of 2004, after nearly a year of intense enemy combat in Iraq, David led his squad into battle to liberate the city of Fallujah and anti-Iraq forces. That was a tough place. This operation was the bloodiest battle of the Iraq war.

For 3 days straight, David and his men kicked down doors, searched houses, and destroyed enemy weapons, never knowing where they would find a terrorist lurking next. And there were plenty of them.

The third day of battle was November 10, David's 29th birthday. That night his squad was tasked with clearing 12 houses occupied by insurgents, a very dangerous operation. They entered house after house and secured nine of the buildings.

Then, came the tenth. That was a tough one. It was a three-story building surrounded by a 9-foot wall. As they entered the house and moved into the living room, two men were behind concrete barricades. They opened fire on David and everybody.

In the dark of night, shards of glass, brick, and plaster flew into the air, wounding multiple soldiers. The rounds of fire ripped holes into the wall separating the Americans from the terrorists. The wall was ripped to shreds. David knew they had to get out. David thought that they had had it. He leapt into the torrent of bullets and fired back at the enemy without even thinking. The insurgents—he just took over. David took over.

He provided suppressive fire while his men evacuated, rescuing his entire squad at the risk of his own life. Only when his men were all out did David exit the building. But the fighting was far from over. Militants on the roof fired down at them with round after deadly round. A Bradley fighting vehicle came to the scene to suppress the enemy and drove them further into the building.

Knowing that he would face almost certain death, David decided to go back inside the house and make sure that not a single terrorist escaped alive or escaped in any way. He quickly encountered an insurgent who was about to fire a rocket-propelled grenade at his squad. David once again jumped into danger and killed him before he had a chance to launch that grenade.

Next, two more insurgents came out of hiding and fired at David. He returned fire, killing them both. Then, a third assailant burst out of a wardrobe—wearing a wardrobe—and opened fire. David shot and wounded the man, but he escaped up the stairs. Racing after him, David engaged in hand-to-hand combat and killed him too.

Bleeding and badly wounded, David had singlehandedly defeated the forces who had attacked. Just then, yet another combatant jumped down from the third-story roof and attacked. David shot him, and the assailant fell off the balcony. Alone, in the dark, David killed four insurgents and seriously wounded the fifth, saving his soldiers, and facing down the enemies of civilization.

Here with us today are 32 American servicemembers who fought with David in Iraq, including 12 who were with David on that very, very horrible and dangerous November night. Please stand. Please.

Did he do a good job?

*Participants.* Yes.

*The President.* If not, you know, it's not too late. [*Laughter*]

Thank you very much for being here. We appreciate it very much.

Also with us are five families of David's brothers-in-arms who made the supreme sacrifice. To the Gold Star families of Sean Sims, Steven Faulkenberg, Scott Lawson, J.C. Matteson, and

Michael Carlson: Our entire Nation expresses our love, loyalty, and everlasting gratitude. Please, stand. Please. Thank you very much for being here. Appreciate it. Thank you.

David often tells young people: "Americans don't want to fight, but if someone picks a fight with us, we will always win. Because we don't fight for awards or recognition. We fight for love of our country, our homeland, our family, and our unit—and that's stronger than anything the enemy has." So thank you. And thank you to his family very much. Great family, David. Thank you.

David exemplifies the same warrior ethos that gave his grandfather and all the heroes of Normandy the strength to defeat evil exactly 75 years ago. I hear that his grandfather Joseph is now 99 years old and that today he's watching this ceremony at his home in Jamestown, New York. A lot of people are watching, David.

America is blessed with the heroes and great people like Staff Sergeant Bellavia whose intrepid spirit and unwavering resolve defeats our enemies, protects our freedoms, and defends our great American flag.

David, today we honor your extraordinary courage, we salute your selfless service, and we thank you for carrying on the legacy of American valor that has always made our blessed Nation the strongest and mightiest anywhere in the world. And we're doing better today than we've ever done. Our country is stronger now, and we're doing better economically than ever before. We're setting records, and you fought for something that's really good, and we appreciate it, David. We really appreciate it. Thank you.

And now I'm very pleased to ask the Military Aide to come forward while I present the congressional Medal of Honor to Staff Sergeant David Bellavia. Please.

*[At this point, Maj. Brandon M. Westling, USAF, Air Force Aide to the President, read the citation, and the President presented the medal, assisted by Lt. Col. Michael E. Ziegelhofer, USA, Army Aide to the President.]*

Chaplain, please. *[Applause]* Thank you, Chaplain.

*[Maj. Gen. Thomas L. Solhjem, USA, Army Chief of Chaplains, said a prayer.]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:36 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Deanna King, wife, and Joseph R. Brunacini, Sr., grandfather, of S. Sgt. Bellavia. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the reading of the citation.

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