

**Defend Our Marines** [main page](#)

## Two Awards, One *Semper Fi*

Bob Weimann | April 10, 2009 | Pdf version

**I missed two award ceremonies this past week** and these two ceremonies make interesting contrasts regarding Marines.

I must admit that I was not invited to the first ceremony nor is there any earthly reason why I should have been. I read about it in a Bing West article, "[Distinguished Disservice: In honoring Murtha, the Navy insults its own](#)". Mr. West, a Marine veteran, is the noted author of several books. His latest is an excellent work about the Iraq War entitled, *The Strongest Tribe*. The Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Donald C. Winter, awarded the Distinguished Public Service Award to Representative John P. Murtha (D-Pennsylvania). Mr. Winter apparently signed off on the award just before he departed with the Bush Administration. This means Mr. Winter's name appears on the award but he was not present to award it.

Murtha, also a Marine veteran, is famous for [his press conference](#) about the Haditha Incident. At that press conference (and others throughout subsequent weeks), Murtha accused a Marine rifle squad, ambushed by terrorist, of "cold blooded murder". These accusations resulted in legal charges against eight Marines (officer and enlisted). Two of the eight cases are pending (one due to lack of prosecutorial evidence and the other due to unlawful command influence). Five other cases have been dismissed. The eighth Marine was acquitted of all charges in a courts-martial.

Mr. West takes exception to the Murtha award and rightfully so. He makes the point that it was not justice that Murtha was after with his premature accusations but "press hype" for his own personal political gain.

For that reason, I can picture this award presentation in Washington. Probably held in a government room designated for such events with pictures of forgotten bureaucrats on the walls, formal looking carpeting still showing the night maintenance crew vacuum marks and fake wooden GAO furniture pushed to the side to make room for the attendees.

I can see the attendees gathering inside this room wearing their expensive suits and "glad handing" their political acquaintances. These folks are masters at the ten second sound-bit and can equivocate and bombast for hours. They are capable of launching into a political move at the drop of a hat, and usually do. They present smiles to the press cameras while wishing they had a protective mini-cam view of their own self-servicing backs. Not a pretty mental picture but as Mr. West states, "Murtha did a great disservice to the military and the nation, and never apologized. The secretary of the Navy did a disservice in honoring Congressman Murtha."

The second ceremony took place in a small, old neighborhood in western Pennsylvania. In a neat but weathered brick building displaying the letters providing its title, American Legion Post, a small group of neighbors gathered to honor one of their local sons.

This group, mostly husbands, fathers and grand fathers, with a sprinkling of wives and moms, is very different when compared to the Washington crowd. Much less stylish, more heads of gray hair and paunches that now cover the muscle that provided the long ago high school era athletic achievements.

Despite the extra pounds, grey hair, bent backs, and other creeping signs of aging, these men individually project an element of strength. You can still see it in their forearms when they grasp a tool and you feel it when they look you in the eye and shake hands. They still have the ability to square their shoulders, set their jaws and provide a disapproving glare that would humble Clint Eastwood. They also send a non-verbal message, that they have the character and will to back it up, that comes through no matter how old.

These men are normally reluctant to provide their political beliefs but can and do interrupt a politically extreme discussion. These interruptions usually consist of the most amazing and imaginable stream of cuss words, learned from their drill instructor, that pauses the targeted orator in total confusion. The bewilderment is usually shaken off when a mutual acquaintance leans over and whispers, "He's a Marine vet". That phrase usually brings the simple exclamation of "oh" from the confused, as silent understanding seeps into their mind that both have a constitutional right to express their opinion. The difference is that a Marine has committed himself, body and soul, to fighting in combat for that right.

I suspect that these are the types of men who gathered last night for the Washington County Marine Corps League meeting in Pennsylvania. Men who serviced their country and returned home to work and raise their families, never expecting anything except the acknowledgement that they did their job.

These men naturally seek each other through the local Marine Corps League because they understand what it means to be a Marine. Much of the that meaning is captured and described simply yet, powerfully in the US Marine Corps motto, *Semper Fidelis - Always Faithful*.

Last night, in Houston, Pennsylvania, a small group of Marines gathered to honor one of their own, LCpl. Justin Sharratt. They presented him with a Marine Corps league medal, a simple award, nothing as prestigious or as official as a Department of Navy Distinguished Public Service Award, but a medal presented by Marines to a Marine for his bravery and the presence of mind he demonstrated in combat. The significance of this event, well founded in Marine Corps lore, is that the best and highest praise always comes from your fellow Marines, something Mr. Murtha could not and did not obtain with his award.

Congratulations to LCpl Justin Sharrett and to the members of the Washington County Marine Corps League. I offer my praise, admiration and salute.

*Semper Fidelis, Marines*

**Bob Weimann**  
**LtCol USMC Ret.**  
**Defend Our Marines**  
**10 April 2009**

*Photos from the event:*



The reading of the citation.





Left to right: Larry Maggi (Washington County Commissioner), Justin Sharratt, and Rusty Howell



Left to right: Theresa Sharratt, Justin Sharratt, and Rusty Howell outside the American Legion Post in Houston, Pennsylvania



Bob Weimann, LtCol USMC Ret

**Bob Weimann** is former Commanding Officer, Kilo Co., 3/1 and a senior contributing editor to **Defend Our Marines**.

---

Read more on the Haditha case by Bob Weimann:

[Sins of the Generals helped John Murtha rush Haditha Marines to injustice](#)

Many thanks to Tim Sumner of *9/11 Families for a Safe and Strong America* for the post and to Pat Carfagno of [Freedom Radio](#) for having Bob as her guest.

[The Sins of Generals, Part One: An open letter to General Michael Hagee, Commandant of the Marine Corps \(2003-2006\)](#), October 11, 2008

[The Sins of Generals Part Two: Undue Influence from the Start](#), October 30, 2008.

[The Sins of Generals, Part Three: An open letter to General Peter W. Chiarelli, Commander of the Multi-National Corps in Iraq \(November 2005-February 2006\)](#), February 8, 2009

[The Case for a Squad Leader: SSgt Wuterich in Haditha](#) July 25, 2008.

[Huzzah! Huzzah! HUZZAHHH!](#), June 6, 2008.

[Open Letter to the Commandant of the United States Marine Corps concerning the 3/1 Haditha Marines](#), February 8, 2008.

Explore Haditha documents:

[Haditha evidence room](#)

---

Go to the Defend Our Marines [main page](#)

Contact us at [WarChronicle@verizon.net](mailto:WarChronicle@verizon.net)