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The Honorable John McHugh
Secretary of the Army
105 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310-0105

Dear Secretary McHugh:

I am writing you today concerning a matter of great concern among both military award historians like myself, as well as other veterans of military service. Over the last several years there has been much discussion regarding the low numbers of awards of the Medal of Honor to warriors who have served in the War on Terrorism.

In 2009 "Army Times" noted the vast difference between the numbers of Medals of Honor in previous wars (WWII-465, Korea-136, Vietnam-247) and the current wars which have resulted in only TEN awards of the Medal of Honor for actions in the War on Terrorism to date. DoD has previously responded to this noting the changing nature of warfare. Following hearings before a House Committee in December 2006 on the matter, I defended the DoD stance in regards to the low numbers of Medals of Honor awarded. I have since come to the conclusion that I was wrong and that there is a systematic failure that may have resulted in heroic soldiers receiving so-called "lesser awards" that should have been properly recognized with the Medal of Honor.

In the decade since the War on Terrorism began, nine heroes of wars past have been belatedly awarded the Medal of Honor, nearly as many as the TEN Medal of Honor heroes of the current wars. While it is important to correct the record and honor warriors of past generations, the focus today should be on a new generation of brave men and women who continue in the traditions of past generations. In fact, in the last decade the U.S. Army has awarded a total of 14 Medals of Honor, eight for heroism in wars decades past, only six to heroes of the current generation.

In both the 2009 "Military Times" story, and a subsequent interview with "Stars and Stripes" for a similar story in June 2010, I cited Army Sergeant First Class Alwyn Cashe as an example of a hero from the current war who should have been awarded the Medal of Honor. Sergeant First Class Cashe was in a Bradley that was hit by an IED on October 17, 2005 in Iraq. His subsequent (posthumous) Silver Star award narrative states:

"SFC Cashe was initially slightly injured and drenched with fuel. Despite his condition, he bravely managed to get out of the gunner's hatch, crawl down the BFV and assist the driver out of the driver's hatch. The driver had been burned and SFC Cashe extinguished his flames. The following minutes were crucial. Six soldiers and a translator were in the back of the Bradley. Flames had engulfed the entire vehicle from the bottom and were coming out of every portal. The squad leader inside the vehicle managed to open the troop hatch door to help the soldiers escape. Without regard for his personal safety, Sergeant First Class Cashe rushed to the back of the vehicle, reaching into the hot flames and started pulling out his soldiers. The flames gripped his fuel soaked uniform.

Flames quickly spread all over his body. Despite the terrible pain, Sergeant First Class Cashe placed the injured soldier on the ground and returned to the burning vehicle to retrieve another burning soldier; all the while, he was still on fire. A crew from a trail Bradley arrived within moments and assisted with CASEVAC. During all this and with severe burns, Sergeant First Class Cashe bravely continued to take control of the chaos. Within minutes, the company First Sergeant was on the scene and began to evacuate the seriously injured soldiers. One of which was Sergeant First Class Cashe. In the end, the national translator was killed in action, and 10 soldiers were injured. Seven of the ten were very seriously injured. Sergeant First Class Cashe stayed a hero through it all. His injuries were the worst as he suffered from 2d and 3d degree burns over 72% of his body. Sergeant First Class Cashe's heroic actions saved the lives of six of his beloved soldiers."

In those interviews I cited Cashe's heroism as eerily similar to those of U.S. Army Air Forces Sergeant Henry "Red" Erwin in World War II. On a bombing mission on 12 April 1945, after a live white phosphorous flare was ignited in the bomb bay of his B-29, Erwin hugged the flare to his body, crawled to the cockpit, and threw it from his bomber that was filled with smoke and in a crash dive. Severely burned, as was Cashe, Erwin's Medal of Honor was one of the most quickly approved in history...presented just seven days later.

The examples of both men vividly illustrate that while the nature of combat may change with time, technology, and tactics, the examples of heroic sacrifice do not. In fact, three years after Alwyn Cashe was awarded the Silver Star, Lieutenant General William G. Webster who at the time of Cashe's action commanded the 3d Infantry Division and Multinational Division-Baghdad wrote: *"Recalling a military career spanning nearly four decades, I cannot remember a story (Cashe) that is its equal; his actions display the very virtues that lie at the heart of the Medal of Honor."*

In fact, recently I received a packet of information regarding Cashe's heroism that includes recommendations by three U.S. Army General Officers noting that Cashe should be awarded the Medal of Honor. They include the following:

▪ *"I am honored to recommend SFC Alwyn C. Cashe for the Medal of Honor. His actions in combat on the evening of 17 October 2005 are among the most selfless and heroic of any I know during our Nation's operations in Iraq....(I) was his brigade commander...His actions were not instinctive—they were not a reflex action—instinct and normal human reaction would have sent him the other way. Rather, SFC Alwyn Cashe consciously, deliberately, willingly subjected himself to the excruciating pain and suffering of flame and smoke to save his Soldiers and continue the mission. I know of no braver, selfless act. We are all forever honored and humbled by his heroic actions. I join the chorus recommending recognition of SFC Cashe's action with award of the Medal of Honor."*
Brigadier General Steven L. Salazar, Deputy Commanding General, JHAATT

▪ *"During that time, I was Commanding General of the 42d Infantry Division....since that time better information and a new perspective has come to light on the specific actions of SFC Cashe on 17 October 2005. The true impact of what he did that evening was not immediately known because of the chaos of the moment and the hopeful fact that those injured the worst were alive when evacuated.....**In all my years***

of service, I have yet to witness or hear of such an act of bravery.” Joseph J. Taluto,
Major General, NYARNG, The Adjutant General

This packet of information regarding Alwyn Cashe is, without exception, the most inspiring and comprehensive such recommendation I have ever seen as regards potential award of the Medal of Honor. It also includes significant indications as to WHY Cashe may have awarded the Silver Star instead of the Medal of Honor:

1. Prior to Cashe’s actions, *“the award seemed most appropriate since up to that point very few soldiers were recommended for Silver Star or above awards.”* (MG Taluto)
2. *“The true impact of SFC Cashe’s actions remained undiscovered until several weeks after the horrific incident when fellow Soldiers and family members related the full scope of his heroism and valor.”* (Colonel Gary M. Brito, Cashe’s former commanding officer.)
3. *“The initial report of the incident classified the event as an IED attack. It was later determined that the event was actually a complex attack with Soldiers combatting both an IED strike and enemy small arms fire.”* (Colonel Brito)

Certainly, determination to award an action the Medal of Honor should not be based upon a quota system of how many and how high awards have been previously presented. Further, if in fact the initial belief that it was a (non-direct fire) IED strike had bearing upon the decision to award the Silver Star, the precedent of Henry Erwin reflects that it is heroism in a combat action that is prerequisite, and that direct fire is not. That said, subsequent information does show in fact, that Cashe performed his heroic deeds while under direct enemy fire.

Sir, while I strongly believe that steps should be taken to review the case of Alwyn Cashe in light of “new information” cited by Colonel Brito, and the inspiring and sincere recommendations of three U.S. Army General Officers, I believe Cashe’s information reveals what may be a systematic breakdown in the Army awards system. I and others believe that, like Cashe, there may be other similar cases of warriors whose actions, when properly reviewed, will be found to have performed heroism at a level consistent with award of the Medal of Honor.

During the Vietnam War the Army awarded a total of 161 Medals of Honor. Of those, at least 30 men were initially awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Those awards were reviewed (after presentation and exclusive of those upgraded in initial investigation) and subsequently upgraded to the Medal of Honor. I am presently unaware of a single instance in the current war in which a so-called “lesser award” has been reviewed, as should have Cashe’s Silver Star, and upgraded. This may be an additional breakdown in the awards process today.

In the 1990s, reflecting on the fact that not one Black American soldier had received the Medal of Honor for heroism in either World War I or World War II, a comprehensive review of Silver Stars and D.S.C.s was ordered, resulting in correcting the records and upgrading one World War II D.S.C. and seven World War II D.S.C.s to Medals of Honor

to Black Soldier-heroes. Similarly, in view of the fact that only one Japanese American received the Medal of Honor in World War II, a review was ordered and subsequently 22 previously awarded Silver Stars and D.S.C.s were upgraded.

I believe the extremely low numbers of Medals of Honor in the current war, citing specifically the case of Alwyn Cashe who stands as a vivid example of the problem in the awards system today, a similar review should be conducted.

Army Awards and Decorations Branch reflects that through August 30, 2010, a total of 615 awards of the Silver Star have been authorized. There have been 22 published awards of the Distinguished Service Cross in the current war. A review of these fewer than 700 awards pales in size to the scope of previous reviews, and I believe, is no less necessary.

Before sharing with you my recommended course of action, I would like to further address a problem related to awards of the Silver Star. Working with "Military Times" I have endeavored to identify all recipients of the Silver Star and higher, and while I've identified and posted citations for all recipients of the D.S.C. and Medal of Honor, to date I have only been able to identify 436 Army Silver Star recipients in the War on Terror and to obtain the citations for 248 of them. In fact, in 2009 I submitted a FOIA for the citations for 24 men who were killed in action in either Iraq or Afghanistan, and posthumously awarded the Silver Star. In 22 of the 24 cases, there was no record in the dead hero's OMPF in St. Louis that he had been awarded a Silver Star.

In 2007 the *Baltimore Sun* submitted a FOIA for GWOT Silver Star citations and reported, "*The Army denied a March 2006 Freedom of Information Act request for the narratives, first on the grounds that it couldn't find all of them.*" As egregious as is a system that may have denied true heroes award of the Medal of Honor, justly earned through their heroism and sacrifice, is the fact that the accounts of such heroism, these award citations, may have been "lost to history."

In light of the above, I would recommend the following courses of actions by the Department of the Army:

1. Establishment of a board to include general officers, living recipients of the Medal of Honor, and one civilian (combat correspondent or awards historian) to collect and review all narratives and accounts of awards of the Silver Star or higher in the War on Terrorism, recommending which if any should be upgraded to either a D.S.C. or Medal of Honor.
2. After redaction of any personal information or details with security concerns, making these citations available for posterity.

As to this latter, an ordered review of all Silver Stars and higher would force the finding and compiling of all Silver Star citations. These can then be compiled in a complete and publicly assessible format for preservation of the accounts of the heroism of our men and women in service today.

In 2006 the U.S. House of Representatives called for DoD to report the feasibility of creating just such a database of military heroes. In April 2009 DoD reported it would be possible, after redaction of certain information, to “*establish a sufficiently complete publicly assessible database of valor award recipients that includes Silver Star and above valor award recipients from September 11, 2001 (to present).*” The Department noted however, that while such a database was possible, it was not specifically recommending that it be done, and cited the cost of such a database as \$250,000 based on Defense Manpower Data Center information.

In point of fact, “Military Times” has become the de facto developer of this database, not only for the current war but all wars in U.S. history. They now make available nearly 90,000 award citations for heroic actions throughout history. That database of Silver Star and higher awards in the War on Terrorism is already more than 60% complete, and the vast majority of what is needed to fully complete it is Silver Star awards to members of the U.S. Army. By ordering a review of the awards in the current wars, and then making available to “Military Times” the citations for all these awards, that noble effort can be achieved at little further cost to the Army or the Department of Defense.

Secretary McHugh, I congratulate you on the Army you direct and lead today. The men and women who serve in uniform ALL do so voluntarily and with quiet professionalism. The current generation of U.S. Army warriors make old soldiers like myself proud. It is important however, they they be properly recognized as the heroes they are.

Respectfully,

C. Douglas Sterner

A D D E N D U M

The following information is provided to address the level of completion of the “Military Times” database of awards of the Silver Star and higher in the War on Terrorism. This database is identical to the aforementioned database referenced in the 2009 DoD report to HASC/SASC, and is publicly available consistent with a description of such a database in that report. That report estimated cost of such a database to be \$250,000. Independently, it has already achieved a greater than 60% level of completion by “Military Times” at NO COST to the Department, and with a small degree of cooperation with the Department of the Army can be brought to completion at little cost to the Department.

The “Military Times” *Hall of Valor* is 100% complete for all first and second level GWOT awards, including full text citations for all awards, as follows:

	Army	Navy	Marines	USAF	Totals
MOH	6	2	2		10
AFX				4	4
NX			28	7	35
DSC	22				22

The only element necessary for completion as specified in the DoD report is to identify ALL recipients of the Silver Star, obtain, and then digitize these citations. Currently the *Hall of Valor* includes the following Silver Stars:

	Army	Navy	Marines	USAF	Total
Estimated Total Silver Stars	625	110	96	43	874
Identified w/Citations Posted	248	20	94	36	398
Identified/Citations Needed	188	5	2	7	202
% Complete/Identified	70%	23%	100%	100%	69%
% Complete w/Citation	40%	18%	98%	84%	46%

When combined with the Medals of Honor and service crosses, at present, the *Hall of Valor* is 71% complete for identification of award recipients, and 50% complete to include full text of the award citations for all branches of service as reflected below:

	Army	Navy	Marines	USAF	Total
Level Complete / Identified	71%	24%	100%	100%	71%
Level Complete w/Citations	42%	20%	98%	87%	50%

The low level of completion for Navy awards is due primarily to the fact that nearly all of these “missing” Silver Stars are awards to Navy Special Warfare (usually SEALs) whose actions remain classified. Conversely however, the majority of the 200 Army recipients needed to identify, or the 400 Army Silver Stars yet to obtain, do not fall under classified operations, they are simply, “lost.”