

Sergeant Scott Montoya



West Covina, CA
The Navy Cross

Small-arms fire rained down on the men of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marines. Both Iraqi civilians and Marines were injured. Pinned down, with the injured needing assistance, Sgt. Scott C. Montoya rushed through enemy fire while "repeatedly exposing himself to fire-swept streets," according to his Navy Cross award citation.

Montoya received the U.S. military's second-highest award at Camp Pendleton for heroism stemming from his actions on April 8, 2003, two weeks into Operation Iraqi Freedom.

With his firearm in one hand engaging the enemy and a badly bleeding Marine in the other, he fought their way 500 yards to safety. He returned to the cross-fire again and dragged another - who'd been dazed by the concussion of a grenade blast - to a casualty collection point. In all, he rescued four injured Marines and one Iraqi civilian out of harm's way, according to his citation.

Montoya's "extraordinary heroism" arose out of the battle for Baghdad.

Montoya described it this way:

"I saw a hurt Marine and all my training came into play. It wasn't a cognitive thing; I just saw the situation and cared for my Marines."

Sgt. Jose N. Sanchez, a supply clerk with 2/23, has known Montoya for six years and wasn't surprised when he heard the news.

"The level he went - it's above and beyond the call of anyone, even a Marine," Sanchez said, adding: "What matters to him are his Marines, not the awards or the actions he took."

Montoya received the award in front of family, friends and the men of his unit. Orange County Sheriff Michael S. Carona was also present.

A deputy sheriff in Orange County, Montoya drew praise from many of his co-workers - including Carona.

"He is a complete warrior," Carona said. "Whether as a Marine or as a law enforcement figure, he is always putting the community or the country above his own personal safety."

Carona alluded to Montoya's rapid response under fire.

"These things happen in the blink of a second, and an individual has to decide to be a hero or not. He decided to be one."

In the end, Montoya said, "It's just a medal."

"Service before self is something I teach in the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program," continued Montoya, a MCMAP instructor for his unit. "I feel the award represents the character of the Corps."

Col. Geffery L. Cooper, the battalion's commanding officer during Operation Iraqi Freedom, said Montoya's award was well-deserved.

"It means a great deal to me that the Corps can recognize such Marines of valor in combat," said Cooper. (Montoya) is a man of integrity and leadership, and his loyalty is unquestionable. He is a great example and advocate for all reservists."

Excerpts from article written by Lance Cpl. Daniel J. Redding, The Scout, MCB Camp Pendleton

