

April 11, 2007

To: Lieutenant Colonel Willard Buhl, Major Brian Heatherman, and Lt. Jeff Sommers

Subject: Recommendation for the Bronze Star for Corporal Sean Stokes

Gentlemen:

As you know, I was an embedded combat historian with Lima Company's 1st Platoon during the Battle of Fallajah in November 2004. My goal was to record the oral histories of our troops serving in Iraq. This project was completed in 2006, when 1st Platoon's experience was chronicled in a critically acclaimed book titled: WE WERE ONE (www.wewereone.com).

During my research for WE WERE ONE, I interviewed nearly every surviving member of 1st Platoon. These interviews took place in Iraq and at Camp Pendleton. Hundreds of hours of testimony reconstruct all of 1st Platoon's major actions during the twelve-plus day assault on Fallujah. Throughout the course of my research, one Marine was constantly brought to my attention by his fellow Marines: Private Sean Stokes.

Private Stokes, now, Corporal Stokes is one of 1st Platoon's true heroes. Even though Stokes was the lowest-ranking member of the platoon during the battle, he was always the first Marine through the door of the houses his fire-team assaulted. His valor was evident on November 10th in an ambush dubbed "Grenade Alley." During the action, Stokes engaged the enemy allowing elements of his squad to escape death from a narrow alley saturated with grenades from enemy fighters. As Stokes suppressed the enemy, and was nearly killed by an enemy grenade. Instead of leaving the platoon and medivacing to the aid station (as he was required to do), Stokes hid his wounds and pushed forward into the city so he could fight along side his fellow Marines. Stokes received the Purple Heart for this action.

Throughout the next week, 1st Platoon's casualties mounted, manpower became acute, and on his own initiative (with the consent of his squad leader) Stokes assumed the responsibilities of a fire team leader, essentially leading a fire-team through the remainder of the battle. Assaulting countless houses (where he was always the first Marine through the door) Stokes killed at least nine enemy fighters, including one in hand-to-hand combat. These nine fighters are confirmed kills, however, nearly every Marine in the platoon concedes this number is likely higher.

On November 17th Stokes was clearing a house when what was left of his rifle squad (about three or four marines) were caught in a complex ambush. Stokes started to clear the final room in the house when a door opened and his squad was sprayed with AK-47 fire, several grenades rolled out the door, one detonating directly

in front of him (this scene was recreated on The History Channel's documentary Shootout: D-Day Fallujah and is fleshed out in WE WERE ONE).

As the grenade exploded, the blast hurled Stokes backward five or six feet into a dark hallway. Nearly unconscious from the blast (he was suffering from a concussion and bleeding from a shrapnel wounds) Stokes miraculously recovered and aimed his weapon at the approaching Chechen fighters who poured out of the doorway and fired upon him. Expending all of his ammunition, Stokes fired his last rounds at the enemy fighters, killing several. Out of ammunition, he began to prep a grenade. Fortunately, he was rescued by Corporal Heath Kramer who later was awarded the Bronze Star for the incident.

After the incident, a dazed and wounded Private Stokes once again refused evacuation to the aid station. Refusing all requests to vacate the field of battle, his Squad leader, Sgt. Kyle ordered him to the aid station. Nearly a year later, Stokes returned to Iraq with the battalion, and I once again I received reports from men in the Platoon on Stokes was leading his squad or acting a scout for the platoon. Remarkably, Stokes never received a decoration for his actions during the Battle of Fallujah.

Since the fall of 1992, I have interviewed nearly 1,500 WWII veterans. Their stories and life experiences span all the epic battles of WWII. During the course of my research, I have reviewed hundreds of award citations from the Bronze Star to the Medal of Honor. I believe Corporal Stokes's courage under fire and leadership rises to the level of a Silver Star. His actions and valor are comparable to the Silver Star awarded to 1st Platoon's Lance Corporal Michael Hanks. However, a conservative approach would merit, at a bare minimum, the Bronze Star. Additionally, I believe Corporal Stokes deserves the Purple Heart he earned on November 17th which is fully documented in his medical records. I respectfully request you initiate a review of Stokes actions in Fallujah and sponsor an award recommendation for the Marine. He is not aware of this request nor has he requested it. He does not covet medals or glory but simply wants to be Marine and serve his country.

If you need any other information I can be reached at xxxxxxxxx. Thank you for your support in this matter.

Semper Fi,

Patrick O'Donnell