



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 17, 2011

Marine Receives Medal of Honor

As he placed the Medal over Meyer's shoulders, President Obama praised the soldier as a "humble young man who repeatedly placed himself in extraordinary danger to save men he regarded as his brothers," reported the [New York Times](#). Said the President: "Today we pay tribute to an American who placed himself in the thick of the fight — again and again and again."

Meyer, who is the first living Marine to receive the Medal of Honor for actions in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, has repeatedly downplayed his heroism, telling the *Times* in an interview that the honor is "a platform for representation of the guys who are out there fighting every day. My story is one of millions, and the others aren't often told."



According to first-hand accounts, Meyer and a fellow Marine, Staff Sergeant Juan Rodriguez-Chavez, went into action after Marines pinned down by the enemy in a village in the Ganjgal Valley radioed back that they would be killed if they did not receive fire support. "Commanders in the valley ordered the two Marines to stay out three times," reported the *Marine Corps Times*, "but with the situation appearing to be dire, the two made the gutsy decision to do it anyway. Army officers at FOB [Forward Operating Base] Joyce refused to send fire support, and were later cited for negligent leadership."

Recalled Meyer: "We knew we were rolling the dice. You're disobeying a direct order in a firefight like this. We either knew we were going to get in there and it was going to be the worst day of our lives, or we were going to get in there and it wasn't going to be as bad as we thought it was going to be, and then we'd have to be answering for the decisions we made."

As the two Marines made their way into danger, their Humvee began taking enemy fire almost immediately. "It was small-arms fire at first, but the insurgents also launched rockets at them from the surrounding mountains," according to the *Marine Corps Times*. "They also took aim with RPGs and DShK machine guns, which fire heavy 12.7mm x 108mm ammunition with similarities to American .50-caliber rounds."

Over the next six hours, according to survivors, Meyer and Chavez led five fights into the valley, rescuing both Afghan and American soldiers who were pinned down by enemy fire. On the final trip, recounted the *New York Times*, "They recovered the remains of three Marines and a Navy corpsman. By then, according to the Marine Corps' account of the fight, Corporal Meyer had killed eight Taliban fighters and stood up to several dozen more."

Of his final actions, during which he found the four fallen American soldiers, Meyer recalled to the *Marine Corps Times*: "I never once in the whole time thought they were all dead. I don't know if that's



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just me lying to myself, or just disbelief, or what it is. But, I never thought they'd all be dead. I thought somebody would be alive."

Meyer told [USA Today](#) that ultimately he went into the face of danger because "my best friends were in there getting shot at." About defying orders to the contrary, he said: "I'd rather be sitting in jail right now for the rest of my life for something like this and those guys be alive than ... questioning if I could have done something different."

Ironically, reported [USA Today](#), Meyer joined the Marine Corps on a whim and in spite of discouragement he received from a Marine recruiter he encountered one day in the high school lunchroom. "Although his grandfather had been a Marine, Meyer said, he hadn't considered the military as part of his future," reported [USA Today](#). "He went up to the recruiter out of curiosity, and as they talked, Meyer told him about his plans to play college football somewhere. The recruiter told him that was a good plan because 'there's no way you could be a Marine.' Meyer walked away but quickly returned. 'You pick up your stuff right now,' Meyer told the recruiter. 'Let's go sign the papers.'" He celebrated his 18th birthday in boot camp at Parris Island.

Of the scores of interview he has had to endure over receiving the Medal of Honor, Meyer said that he tolerates the publicity in order to honor his friends and fellow soldiers killed that day, as well as those still fighting in Afghanistan. "It's kind of frustrating because everyone wants to get an interview about the worst day of your life," he told [USA Today](#). "At the end of the day, I do it because I think it needs to be told."

Photo of Dakota Meyer: AP Images



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