

Maureen Murphy, mother of Lt. Michael Murphy (lower right), cries as she holds the Medal of Honor posthumously awarded to her son on Monday for his actions in Afghanistan.

For selfless sacrifice, a SEAL is honored

Lt. Michael Murphy gave his life in Afghanistan in a bid to save his comrades

By Devlin Barrett

Associated Press

WASHINGTON— Shot in the back, making a desperate call for help for his men trapped on the side of an Afghanistan cliff, Lt. Michael Murphy heard help was on the way, and said simply: "Roger that, sir. Thank you."

The 29-year-old Navy SEAL from Patchogue, N.Y., gave his life in order to make that call, putting himself in a position exposed to enemy fire but the only one in which he could get a signal.

That selfless act was honored Monday by President Bush at the White House, where he presented Murphy's parents with the Medal of Honor — the nation's highest military award for valor, and the first given for combat in Afghanistan.

Moments before the emotional ceremony, Murphy's parents gave Bush a gold dog tag with their son's name and im-

age on it.

"What we were most touched by was that the president immediately put that on underneath his shirt, and when he made the presentation of the Medal of Honor, he wore that against his chest," said Dan Murphy.

After the ceremony, Dan Murphy said, Bush told the family, "I was inspired by having Michael next to my chest."

The father, who fought back tears during the ceremony, said they were "deeply moved" by Bush's gesture.

"It was very emotional on everybody's part," said Maureen Murphy.

Bush praised their son's battlefield decision as typical of someone who, even as a boy, was devoted to others.

"While their missions were often carried out in secrecy, their love of country and devotion to each other was always clear," Bush said.

"On June 28, 2005, Michael would give his life for these ideals."

Murphy's parents both cried at points in the ceremony as they stood next to the president and listened as their son's heroism was recounted. Vice President Dick Cheney also at-

tended, as did a handful of past Medal of Honor recipients.

"There's a lot of awards in the military, but when you see a Medal of Honor, you know whatever they went through is pretty horrible. You don't congratulate anyone when you see it," said Marcus Luttrell, the lone member of Murphy's team to survive the firefight with the Taliban.

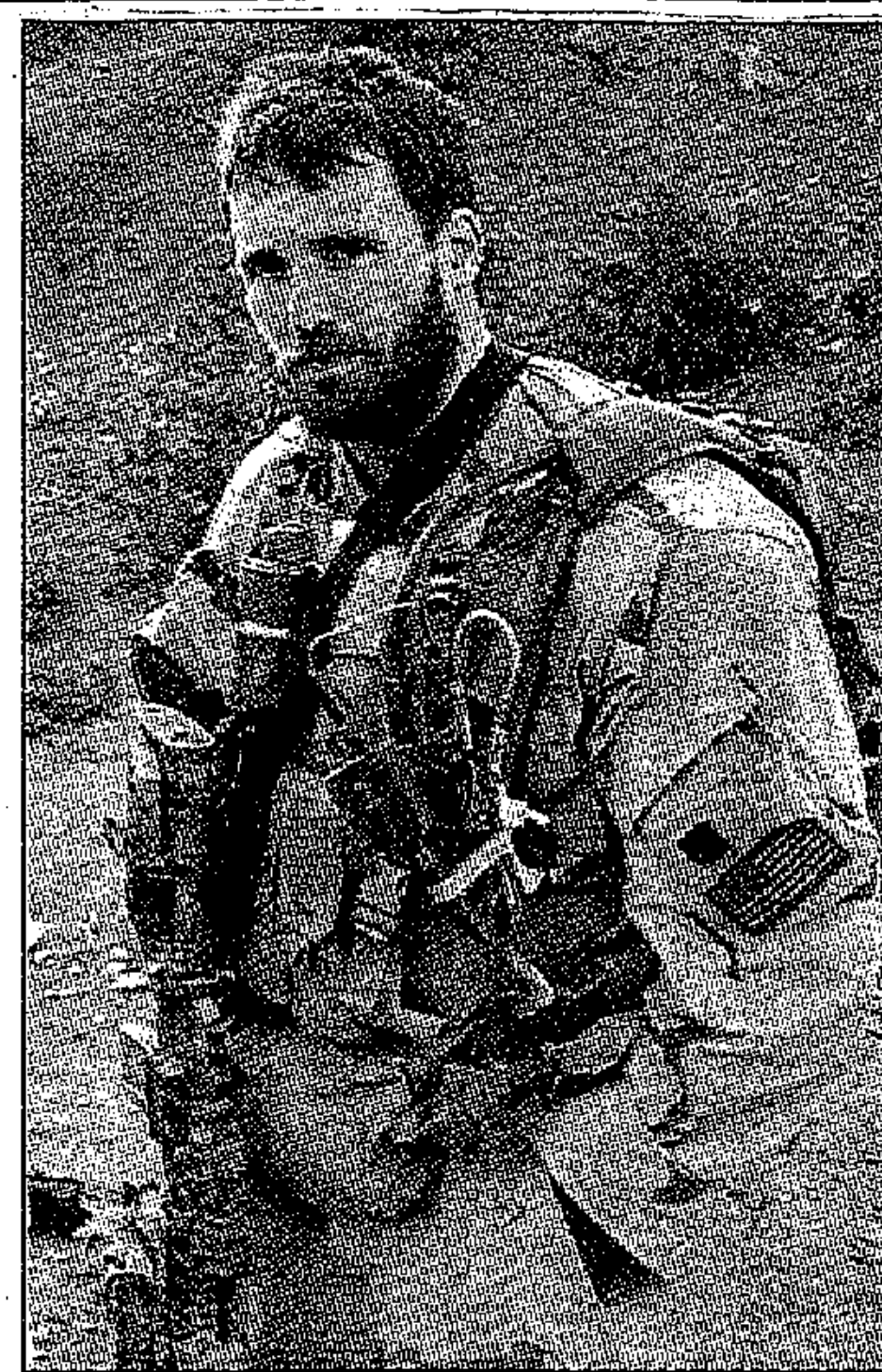
Murphy, Luttrell and two other SEALs were searching for an insurgent when their mission was compromised after they were spotted by Afghans, who presumably alerted the Taliban to their presence.

An intense gun battle ensued, with more than 50 anti-coalition fighters swarming around the four SEALs.

Although wounded, Murphy is credited with risking his own life by moving into the open for a better position to transmit a call for help.

Still under fire, Murphy provided his unit's location and the size of the enemy force. At one point he was shot in the back, causing him to drop the mobile phone. Murphy picked it back up and completed the call.

He then returned to his cover position with his men and con-



U.S. Navy photo

tinued the battle. A U.S. helicopter sent to rescue the men was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade, killing all 16 aboard. It was the worst single-day death toll for U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

By the end of the two-hour gunfight, Murphy and two of his comrades were also dead. An estimated 35 Taliban militants were also killed. Luttrell was blown over a ridge and knocked unconscious. He escaped, and was protected by villagers for several days before he was rescued.

Murphy is the fourth Navy SEAL to earn the award and the first since the Vietnam War. Two Medals of Honor have been awarded posthumously in the Iraq war: to Marine Cpl. Jason Dunham, who was killed in 2004 after covering a grenade with his helmet, and to Army Sgt. 1st Class Paul R. Smith, who was killed in 2003 after holding off Iraqi forces with a machine gun at the Baghdad airport.