

Commanders Corner, May 2021

There was no May 2021 Executive Board and Post meetings due to restrictions on social gatherings related to the COVID-19 outbreak; Post and Executive Committee meetings are suspended until further notice. The South Montgomery County Community Center has advised that they will remain closed until further notice. We will advise if there are any updates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed our activities. Although restrictions are being lifted I encourage you to continue to use good judgment in your upcoming activities. Please follow the guidelines for mask use and social distancing.

As previously reported, although the 2021 Texas Boys State program was initially scheduled to be an attended event this year at UT Austin, 27 June – 2 July, 2021 it was subsequently changed to be a virtual event as was done last year. We were able to sign up thirty nine candidates from six local High Schools. This is sure to be a good event and we are looking forward to a great participation. We will report on the results of this event in a future issue.

In a previous issue I reported on Martin (Marty) Joseph Gonzalez, son of Tomas Gonzales, a long time member of our Post and a diligent volunteer for Honor Guard services at the National Cemetery. Tomas lost his son last November, 2020. Martin (Marty) Joseph Gonzalez was a Marine Sergeant who served in combat in Iraq. He was involved in many assaults, particularly in Fallujah in 2004. He was wounded multiple times, receiving three Bronze Stars with Valor and three Purple Hearts. He suffered ongoing disabilities and eventually succumbed to complications from his injuries. He has been profiled in documentaries on the American Heroes Channel and he is honored at the Fallen Warriors Memorial on Cutten Road in Houston. He is interred in the Houston National Cemetery. I go there often and have now added Marty to my list of veterans to visit there.

Since I previously reported on this, Tomas has provided further information. Below are the official documented accounts of two separate firefights in which Sergeant Gonzalez earned his first two Bronze Stars.



### 3/5 Marines find house of Janabi

Submitted by: 1st Marine Division

Story by: Computed Name: Lance Cpl.  
Miguel A. Carrasco Jr.

Story Identification

#: 20041257551

**FALLUJAH, Iraq (Nov 24, 2004)** -- U.S. Marines with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, found the house of Abdullah Janabi, a well known insurgent leader, in Fallujah, Iraq, Nov. 24.

During Operation Al Fajr, Company K has kicked in more than 1,000 doors from approximately 500 homes while conducting hasty and detailed searches for the small pockets of insurgents.

Before finding Janabi's house, the platoon had cleared almost 15 houses earlier that day and taken in about 30 insurgents who willingly gave up.

"At first I didn't even know who Janabi was, but when I found out that we found something big we all felt good about it," said Cpl. Mason H. Fisher, 23, a native of Jordanville, N.Y., and a team leader with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3/5.

Janabi is believed to have been the right hand man of Abu Musab Zarqawi, the believed leader of the insurgents who were operating out of Fallujah.

The squads also found several weapons, explosive ordinance items and other materials linking Janabi to the nearby area. Later, Marines from Company K found one of the biggest caches in a nearby mosque.

"We found weapons caches near Janabi's house and with the help of (intelligence), we were able to link his house to the mosque nearby as well," said 2nd Lt. Colin M. Browning, a platoon commander with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3/5.

The area in which Janabi's house was located was a step up from the normal ragged homes.

"(Janabi) lived in a very wealthy neighborhood, it was almost like Beverly Hills in Fallujah," said Browning, 24, a native of Thief River Falls, Minn.

The Marines with 3/5 have been in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom since September. With most of the Marines returning to Iraq for a second or third time, the battalion has learned to pass on the knowledge they find to every Marine.

"Everything we were able to find will help in our fight against the insurgents and will keep Marines who are in the fight safer," said Sgt. Martin J. Gonzalez, 24, a native of Houston and a squad leader with Co. K, 3/5. "The insurgents are running and not fighting, I am glad we have

commander with Company K.

Marines manning observation and listening posts near Iraqi highways are crucial to the security and stability operations in Iraq. Multinational forces transport gear and personnel through the Iraqi highways, making the roads high-risk targets.

"Calvert really showed diligence while taking fire, spotting the enemy and reporting it to higher chain of command," said Moulder, 30, a native of Coatesville, Penn. "He was the eyes and ears of the supply route."

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**Photos included with story:**



During a rocket attack on a Marine listening and observation post Oct. 30, near Fallujah, Iraq, Lance Cpl. Jason Calvert, a truck driver with Headquarters and Service Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, reported a truck conducting suspicious activity to his higher chain of command. A quick response force approached the vehicle, and discovered a rocket launcher and mortar tube in the back of the truck. After further investigation, it was determined that the two men in the truck were directly involved in the attack on the Marines. Calvert, 26, of Lemoore, Calif., prevented the vehicle from a continued attack. Photo by: Sgt. Luis R. Agostini

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Text version of story is attached below:



## Firefight last longest 15 seconds of Marines' lives

Submitted by: 1st Marine Division

Story by: Computed Name: Lance Cpl.

Miguel A. Carrasco Jr.

Story Identification

#: 200412842523

**FALLUJAH, Iraq(Dec. 4, 2004)** -- The Marines wait with eager eyes steady on the first door on the left as they reach the second floor of an average Iraqi home. With rounds chambered into their M-16 rifles, 9mm pistols and shotguns, the Marines realize that this may be a door to a room like the many thousand before it: empty with sand and dust everywhere and not an enemy to be found. But, these Marines do not take it for granted.

They stand holding their weapons with sweaty fingers ready to pull the trigger if necessary. The adrenaline starts pumping and the blood rushes through to the heart at an increasing pace. The possibility of an attack from the other side of the door continues to run through their minds as they prepare to breach the room, unleashing all hell from inside.

This was a similar scene for Marines with 2nd Squad, 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, who entered a house in Fallujah, Iraq, with the intent of clearing houses of insurgents during Operation Al Fajr Nov. 14.

As the Marines reached the top of the second floor, the point man noticed two rooms on the left and two directly in front. The point man rolled passed the first door in order to provide security from the remaining three doors.

The second Marine now the point man kicked in the door with no idea of what was on the other side waiting for him.

"All of a sudden I heard 5.56 rounds coming in and out of the room," said Lance Cpl. Kip P. Yeager, a team leader with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3/5. "Then, I saw Payton on the ground in pain."

The insurgents inside the room tried to throw a grenade out of the room but Lance Cpl. George Payton, a team leader with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3/5, blocked it with his body, the blast evered his left leg.

While Payton was still on the ground he was still firing back at the insurgents," said Sgt. Martin Gonzalez, 24, a native of Houston, and a squad leader with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3/5.

After the first explosion you couldn't hear anything, I couldn't even hear my own weapon as I was firing at the insurgents inside the room," said Cpl. Mason H. Fisher, a team leader with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3/5.

Not knowing the severity of Payton's injury the Marines knew they needed to get him out of the line of fire as soon as possible.

"As I reached down to grab Payton, I was surprised to see his hand reach back up to me. We got him out of the way so he wouldn't receive further injuries," said Yeager, 20, a native of Powderhorn, Colo.

The Marines were inside of a house in the middle of a firefight and were unaware of what was still inside the room.

"I made eye contact with (Fisher) and noticed that we both had grenades ready to throw inside the room," said Yeager. "I yelled 'frag out!' and threw the grenade inside the room along with (Fisher)."

A grenade has only a 4 second response time till it blows up. Just as both grenades went inside the room, the unthinkable happened.

"I saw the grenade bounce back out of the room and without even thinking about what I was doing picked it up and threw it back inside the room," said Fisher, 23, a native of Jordanville, N.Y.

"It seemed like forever before the grenades went off, in fact the whole firefight lasted about 15 to 20 seconds," surprisingly said Yeager. "It was the longest 15 seconds of my life."

Before the smoke could settle from the two grenade blasts Gonzalez went into the room and had a M-16 pointed at him from one of the insurgent inside the room.

"There was no round in the chamber. He pulled the trigger and nothing happened and then he was shot and killed by me and Yeager," said Gonzalez.

Like many of the insurgents who have been caught or killed the ones inside the room were high on drugs. Gonzalez didn't hesitate to shoot another insurgent in the room, on methamphetamines, with a rocket propelled grenade launcher loaded.

"He didn't go down after the first few shots, so Yeager took him out," said Gonzalez.

The corpsman was nearby but because Payton was still near the fire lanes of the Marines, the corpsman could not get to him right away.

"My main concern was Payton, I knew right away I needed to apply a tourniquet to his left leg," said Seaman Apprentice Jae Y. Kwon, a field corpsman with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3/5. "As soon as the firing stopped I ran past the door way and started to assess Payton."

With the smoke still surrounding them, the Marines moved onto the next three rooms to make sure the entire house was fully cleared.

"There was so much smoke that everyone's lips were turning black," said 2nd Lt. Colin M. Browning, a platoon commander with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3/5.

After most of the smoke had cleared and the Marines had made sure the rest of the rooms were secured, the third and final insurgent revealed himself.

"The last (insurgent) was inside a locker in that same room, he was injured from the blasts and shooting," said "When I went inside the room again their he was about to kill one of us so I put some rounds into him."

The doc and platoon commander were working on Payton who had gotten shot three times and suffered most of his from the first grenade explosion.

"I held him in my arms trying to reassure him everything would be okay," said Browning, 24, a native of Thief River Falls, Minn.

"The whole Marine Corps scene was new to me, but Payton was one of the first to welcome me to the team," said Kwon, 19, a native of Maryland. "I tried everything to give him the best chance of living."

Payton, 21, a native of Culver City, Calif., passed away the following day, but the loss this Marine will not be forgotten by the Devil Dogs and docs who worked with him.

"He will always be remembered," said Yeager, Payton's best friend. "By his family and friends back in his hometown but also here in this battalion."

The battalion has been in Iraq since September in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II-2.

On any given day in Fallujah, firefights can start and end in a matter of seconds, but Marines must be prepared to handle the worst at any moment.

"It was the training and discipline of the platoon that ultimately saved the lives of more Marines that day," said Browning.

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#### Photos included with story:



Lance Cpl. George Payton, a team leader with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, was shot three times and suffered a severed left leg during a grenade explosion while clearing a house of insurgents in Fallujah, Iraq, Nov. 14, during Operation Al Fajr. Payton, 21, a native of Culver City, Calif., had been in Iraq since September in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II-2. Photo by: Lance Cpl. Miguel A. Carrasco



These U.S. Marines with 3rd Platoon, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, will never forget their fallen comrade Lance Cpl. George Payton. During Operation Al Fajr Payton was shot three times and suffered a severed left leg during a grenade explosion while clearing a house of insurgents in Fallujah, Iraq, Nov. 14. Photo by: Lance Cpl. Miguel A. Carrasco

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Text version of story is attached below:

His Commanding Officer at the base will be receiving the final authority letter to designate the MCSFBn barracks as the “Sgt. Marty Gonzalez barracks”. An official dedication ceremony is pending.

Tomas is sending me further information about his son which I will continue to report on in future issues.

One of the topics I am interested in is news about our MIAs. Below is a link to a website (Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency) that documents recovery of MIAs:

<https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/>

This is an impressive website that showcases the diligence this agency pursues in accounting for our MIAs.