

American Legion National Commander blasts AP decision to release image of fallen Marine hero

INDIANAPOLIS (September 4, 2009) – “Outrageously irresponsible,” is how the leader of the nation’s largest veterans organization characterized the Associated Press’s decision to release a photo of a dying U.S. Marine taken in Afghanistan.

“The lack of compassion and common decency shown by the Associated Press in releasing this photograph is stunning,” said American Legion National Commander Clarence E. Hill, a retired Navy captain. “Lance Corporal Joshua Bernard is a hero who gave his life for his country. His family is understandably offended. I have asked the American Legion state commander in Maine to reach out to his family. Indeed everybody in The American Legion stands with his family.”

The photo shows Bernard bleeding after being struck by a rocket-propelled grenade in a Taliban ambush Aug. 14. Before the photograph was publicly released, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates asked Thomas Curley, AP’s president and chief executive officer to refrain from transmitting the image. “Out of respect for his family’s wishes, I ask you in the strongest of terms to reconsider your decision. I do not make this request lightly...The issue here is not law, policy or constitutional right – but judgment and common decency.”

“Secretary Gates was right,” Hill added. “The issue is judgment and common decency. There is some information, some actions that occur, that are simply too private, too personal, and too tragic to be intentionally broadcast into the homes of millions. For families with loved ones overseas, the fear of what might happen to them is a near constant companion. This photo not only keeps open the wounds of war for the Bernard family, but it also increases the fear for the families of those who are still facing the reality of sudden death every day.”

Hill called for a review by the Department of Defense of the rules governing embedded media. “This should never have occurred in the first place, nor should it be allowed to occur again,” Hill said. “Ironically, when I visited Camp Delta at Guantanamo, the photographer was prohibited from taking images showing the faces of detained terrorists. Yet, photographers are allowed to shoot photographs of fallen American heroes? Where is the common sense? Where is the common decency?”

With a membership of 2.6-million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and patriotic youth programs.