

# REMEMBER — THE — RAMRODS

AN ARMY BROTHERHOOD  
IN WAR AND PEACE

DAVID BELLAVIA



MARINER BOOKS

*New York Boston*

Map of Iraq by the United Nations Department of Field Support, Cartographic  
Section: Map No. 3835, Rev. 6 (July 2014).

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#### MEDAL OF HONOR CITATION

Staff Sergeant David G. Bellavia distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on November 10, 2004, while serving as a squad leader in support of Operation Phantom Fury in Fallujah, Iraq. While clearing a house, a squad from Staff Sergeant Bellavia's platoon became trapped within a room by intense enemy fire coming from a fortified position under the stairs leading to the second floor. Recognizing the immediate severity of the situation, and with disregard for his own safety, Staff Sergeant Bellavia retrieved an automatic weapon and entered the doorway of the house to engage the insurgents. With enemy rounds impacting around him, Staff Sergeant Bellavia fired at the enemy position at a cyclic rate, providing covering fire that allowed the squad to break contact and exit the house. A Bradley Fighting Vehicle was brought forward to suppress the enemy; however, due to high walls surrounding the house, it could not fire directly at the enemy position. Staff Sergeant Bellavia then re-entered the house and again came under intense enemy fire. He observed an enemy insurgent preparing to launch a rocket-propelled grenade at his platoon. Recognizing the grave danger the grenade posed to his fellow soldiers, Staff Sergeant Bellavia assaulted the enemy position, killing one insurgent and wounding another who ran to a different part of the house. Staff Sergeant Bellavia, realizing he had an un-cleared, darkened room to his back, moved to clear it. As he entered, an insurgent came down the stairs firing at him. Simultaneously, the previously wounded insurgent reemerged and engaged Staff Sergeant Bellavia. Staff Sergeant Bellavia, entering further into the darkened room, returned fire and eliminated both insurgents. Staff Sergeant Bellavia then received enemy fire from another insurgent emerging from a closet in the darkened room. Exchanging gunfire, Staff Sergeant Bellavia pursued

the enemy up the stairs and eliminated him. Now on the second floor, Staff Sergeant Bellavia moved to a door that opened onto the roof. At this point, a fifth insurgent leapt from the third floor roof onto the second-floor roof. Staff Sergeant Bellavia engaged the insurgent through a window, wounding him in the back and legs, and caused him to fall off the roof. Acting on instinct to save the members of his platoon from an imminent threat, Staff Sergeant Bellavia ultimately cleared an entire enemy-filled house, destroyed four insurgents, and badly wounded a fifth. Staff Sergeant Bellavia's bravery, complete disregard for his own safety, and unselfish and courageous actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army.





The Ramrods. Fallujah, November 8, 2004. *Courtesy of the author*



Part of our wrecking crew in the ruins of Fallujah in November 2004. *Left to right:* Unknown EOD Soldier, myself, Staff Sergeant Colin Fitts, Sergeant Chuck Knapp, and Specialist John Ruiz. *Courtesy of CSM Darrin Bohn*

Command Sergeant Major Steven Faulkenburg (*center foreground*), with First Sergeant Peter Smith (*rear*) and Chaplain Ric Brown (*right*), just before the Second Battle of Fallujah in November 2004. CSM Faulkenburg was killed in action only a short time after this photo was taken.

*Courtesy of CSM Darrin Bohn*



Captain Doug Walter, our old company commander from Germany, returned to us after Captain Sean Sims was killed in action during the Second Battle of Fallujah. His presence lifted our spirits after we'd taken such heavy casualties. Photo taken on November 18, 2004, in the city.

*Courtesy of CSM Darrin Bohn*







Early on in the deployment we found this artillery-shell-turned-roadside-bomb near Muqdadiyah. We quickly learned that picking one up, as I did here, was extremely foolish. These old shells were very unstable and sometimes detonated on the insurgents, blowing them to pieces. *Courtesy of Christopher Walls*



When out on counter-IED missions, paying attention to suspicious signs on the ground beside the roads we used often meant the difference between life and death. This is one example: buried wires that ran to a hole the insurgents used to lay IEDs. The wire would be connected to the bomb, then detonated when the other end of the wires were connected to a battery. *Courtesy of the author*





Taken in the aftermath of a raid. Sergeant First Class James Cantrell and I discuss the mission, with a detainee on the ground next to us, back at FOB Normandy. The photo was taken in December 2004, just after we returned from Fallujah. *Courtesy of Peter Smith*



Riding a donkey to make the local kids laugh during a quiet patrol in Diyala Province in 2004. Years later, I learned that a 1st Infantry Division GI was photographed by a Signal Corps cameraman doing the exact same thing in Normandy in the summer of 1944. *Courtesy of Patrick Magner*

Staff Sergeant Omarr Hardaway, seen in the spring of 2004 in Iraq. Years after we came home, Omarr became a regular guest on my radio show and has been one of my most trusted friends since our days in combat together.

*Courtesy of the author*



Inside our NCO barracks at FOB Normandy, sharing stories from our latest mission in the spring of 2004. Seated (*left to right*): Sergeant Brad Unterseher, Staff Sergeant Wade Smith, and Staff Sergeant Cory Brown. I'm standing in front of the group, our battle maps behind me, recounting the last mission we'd undertaken. *Courtesy of the author*

Specialist John Ruiz grabs some late-night chow in the converted morgue that served as our dining facility at FOB Normandy.

*Courtesy of the author*



First Platoon, Alpha Company 2-2 secures the second story of a house in Fallujah on November 10, 2004. *Left to right:* Sergeant Wilson, Specialist Ofori, Specialist Howard. *U.S. Army*



Three generations of Bellavias: my father, myself, and Evan shortly after I left the Army and came home from Germany. The photo was taken while we were on vacation in Orlando, Florida, in August 2005.

*Courtesy of the author*



On to D.C. Michael Ware greets me in the lobby of the hotel as we arrive for Medal of Honor week in June 2019. *Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



In D.C., reunited for the first time since 2004 with Joey Seyford (*left*) and Travis Barreto (*right*), two exceptionally courageous Ramrods who engaged in the desperate point-blank firefight in a Fallujah house that claimed Captain Sims's life.

*Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



After all these years . . . My mother finally meets my Ramrod friends she'd heard so much about, both in the letters I sent home from Iraq, and after I returned. She greeted each one as family. Here, she talks to Chad Ellis (*right*) and Peter Smith (*left*, in leather jacket). *Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



*Left to Right: Chuck Knapp, John Ruiz, and Gary Frey together at the Pentagon during Medal of Honor week. Knapp and Ruiz were two of the best Soldiers I served with in Iraq. Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



*My children in D.C., dressed for the White House ceremony: Evan, Vivienne, and Aiden. Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*





John Bruning and I wrote *House to House* together in 2006 and had been close friends ever since, but we had never met in person. This was the moment we changed that. At the sergeant major of the Army's reception, Medal of Honor week. *Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



Reunited with the best senior NCOs a young infantryman could ever ask for: Darrin Bohn (*left*) and Peter Smith (*right*). *Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



Media day at the Pentagon. Here we are under the lights, getting questions thrown at us. *Left to right:* Colonel Doug Walter, Lieutenant Colonel Joaquin Meno, myself, Colin Fitts, and Michael Ware. *Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



*Left to right:* Chuck Knapp, Chad Ellis, Omarr Hardaway, and myself, together during Medal of Honor Week. It was the first time we'd all seen each other since our 2004–05 deployment. *Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



The Ramrods of Alpha Company meet U.S. Army Chief of Staff General James McConville and Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy while at the Pentagon during Medal of Honor week. To my left is Ryan McCarthy; to my right is General McConville.  
*Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



Master Sergeant John Gregory, who'd been one of our team leaders in 2004, poses next to a photo of himself in Iraq that we randomly discovered at the Pentagon.  
*Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



Captain Sean Sims's son, Colin, with me in D.C. His arrival to meet the Ramrods became one of the most emotional moments of Medal of Honor week and led to the fulfillment of a fourteen-year oath we'd made with his father.

*Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



The veterans of Alpha Company, Task Force 2-2 at the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes display honoring our unit. *Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



President Trump reads the Medal of Honor citation to our national audience. The words took me right back to November 10, 2004, into that desperate room-to-room firefight we fought at the height of the Second Battle of Fallujah. *Courtesy of John R. Bruning*



President Trump awards me the Medal of Honor. Though the ceremony happened on his watch, and he signed the citation, the review that led to this moment started under President Obama's administration. The Medal of Honor is nonpolitical, and has served as a rallying point for national unity for generations. It stands as a symbol of America's long heritage of courage and resolve in the face of desperate odds.

*Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



After the East Room ceremony, with two exceptionally special guests: Jennifer Connors and Tonya Faulkenburg, our fallen command sergeant major Faulkenburg's daughter and widow. *Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



My mother, Marilyn Bellavia, and I share a moment at the White House after the Medal of Honor ceremony.

*Courtesy of U.S. Army  
SGT Kevin Roy*





Our company's interpreter, Sammy, stands to my right as all the Ramrods flood onto the East Room platform after I ask President Trump if they may be honored. Sammy was a trusted member of our team, carrying a weapon of his own and repeatedly engaging insurgents right alongside us. To my left is Victor Santos, one of our company's most dependable and capable Soldiers. *Courtesy of U.S. Army SGT Kevin Roy*



Our American prayer. The Ramrods on stage together with our president, before an audience of millions of our fellow Americans. A moment shared of peace, unity, and strength between those we fought with and those we fought for all those years ago.

*Courtesy of John R. Bruning*