



A BRONZE STAR POWER POINT? ACTUALLY, NOT...

"The best and only safe road to honor, glory, and true dignity is justice." --George Washington (1779)

In keeping with our publishing deadlines, every Tuesday morning I send notice of my topic for Thursday's column to our editorial team. This week, I sent notice that I was writing about "military award inflation," and particularly a story from reputable news sources about an Air Force chaplain, Lt. Col. Jon Trainer, who received a Bronze Star for a PowerPoint.



Bronze Star Medal

I first read this story under an inflammatory National Review Online headline, "[Air Force Chaplain Awarded Bronze Star for PowerPoint Teaching Proper Sensitivity for the Koran](#)." National Review is, usually, a trusted source for conservative commentary, but in this case, an NRO editor created his "cut and paste" commentary from a local paper, the Dayton Daily News, originally under the headline, "[Local Chaplain Played Vital Role in War](#)."

The Dayton paper did not report the basis for the Bronze Star award accurately, emphasizing LTC Trainer's PowerPoint instead of his service and leadership in Afghanistan, and then NRO repeated

that error under a sensational headline. (Since when do outstanding conservative sites like NRO rely on a local newspaper to report a story accurately?)

By Wednesday afternoon, the NRO version had been picked up by thousands of news sites and blogs -- from FrontPageMag to blogger Debbie Schlusel to Glenn Beck.

My original commentary angle was to use the "PowerPoint Bronze" story as a case in point of military award inflation, and then focus on the ill-conceived Distinguished Warfare Medal, proposed by former SecDef Leon Panetta, for drone operators and cyber warriors. The DWM is now rightly under reconsideration by the Department of Defense, after Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), a Marine combat veteran of OIF and OEF, and other veterans in Congress, objected to the award because its order of precedence places it above the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Air Medal, and Air Force, Army and Navy/ Marine Commendation Medals for valor.

Let me be clear: Drone operators and cyber warriors, like other rear-echelon warriors, most certainly deserve recognition for their dedication and skill in support of combat troops, but those awards should not have an order of precedence over [awards for valor in combat](#). I have yet to meet any backfield warrior who would suggest otherwise.

Panetta's proposed order of precedence was completely unacceptable, and I thought the mindset that conjured up the DWM was demonstrably similar to that of military commanders who would honor a PowerPoint with a Bronze Medal, even though the latter clearly did not include a combat "V" for valor as defined by Executive Order 9419 (1944).

So I set about to draw a comparison.

Now, military award inflation is nothing new. Any combat vet can tell you outrageous stories of undeserved military awards and decorations, and they can cite the valorous warriors who should have received them instead. (An obvious case in point would be [John Kerry](#), who virtually wrote his own Purple Heart and Silver Star citations.)

However, as I began my own research Tuesday, it quickly became apparent that the NRO story headline was appallingly misleading. Worse, the focus of other commentators who picked up the NRO story had devolved from legitimate and reasonable questions about the merits of this award to outright attacks on the character of the award recipient, LTC Trainer.

For example, Schlüssel's commentary on this "Dhimmi Power Point" appeared under the heading, "[It's official: you can now earn a Bronze Star for Islamo-pandering | www.debbieschlussel.com/60199/air-force-chaplain-awarded-bronze-star-for-pro-koran-powerpoint-presentation/]." She indicted Trainer: "This schmuck in uniform doesn't care. He's also probably one of those left-wing Christians who hates Israel and loves Palestinian terrorists. It jibes with the rest of his now-bronzed BS."

Typical of the blogging blather was this missive: "The military is now awarding medals to servicemen who pander to Muslim sensitivities. So if you're in the military and you'd like a prestigious Bronze Star, just encourage your fellow soldiers to submit to Sharia."

This errant slandering of LTC Trainer gave a whole new meaning to the notion, "death by PowerPoint."

Needless to say, the focus of my column changed -- *not to defend the award* -- but to defend the Chaplain and set the record straight. I have seen the award recommendation. It is not based on a PowerPoint. I have seen the slide presentation. It does not constitute PC pandering to Islam.



LTC Jon Trainer

I contacted LTC Jon Trainer Tuesday afternoon, something no other policy analysts or commentators had done, to discuss the matter with him directly. I also contacted field commanders in Afghanistan for comment on the PowerPoint he developed.

Here is the truth about Jon Trainer and his tour in Afghanistan.

Trainer is a 51-year old Christian pastor, heading the clergy at [New Hope Bible Church](#) in Pataskala, Ohio. He is married to a schoolteacher and they have two children. He has earned BA, MA and MDiv degrees, and is near completion of his DMin from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He also has earned an MS from the USAF Air University Air War College. In addition to his family and church life, Jon has other leadership roles in his community.

He is both conservative theologically and politically, as anyone could plainly determine from his [Facebook page](#) and [Twitter feed](#). It is no small irony that he's a regular reader of National Review Online and has been a subscriber for years.

Trainer is also a citizen soldier.

He has served with the Ohio Air National Guard, as chaplain to the 251st Combat Communications Group in Springfield since 2000. In 2011, he volunteered for a tour in Afghanistan as the USFOR-A Training & Pastoral Care Chaplain, Command Staff in Kabul, where he used his considerable skill and intellect to assist countless warriors in theater with a wide range of problems, and to train other chaplains.

After the accidental destruction of Islamic religious materials by U.S. troops at Bagram Airfield in 2011, which led to greatly strained relations between the

U.S. and Afghan government, Marine Gen. John Allen, commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, requested that LTC Trainer prepare for U.S. service personnel a training orientation on Muslim religious articles.

That brief 20-slide PowerPoint, "Handling and Disposal of Islamic Religious Materials," was ordered by Gen. Allen to be distributed throughout the Afghan theater, and incorporated into the pre-deployment training orientation for incoming military and civilian personnel -- those who would be operating side by side with Afghan Muslim soldiers and Islamic community leaders. By all accounts, understanding Islamic culture is critical to the successful seeding of democracy in an Islamic country, and Trainer's presentation hardly amounted to "a PowerPoint appeasement of our enemy" as some have framed it.

Among Trainer's responsibilities in Afghanistan, that PowerPoint was an insignificant contribution, except for the high-profile coverage of the Quran burnings, which put it and him in the crossfire. Fact is, Trainer should be recognized, first and foremost, for his "Ask, Care, Escort" suicide prevention curriculum for military personnel. According to his commander, Col. David Smith, Trainer "crafted outstanding programs on suicide prevention ... which exponentially impacted tens of thousands of Service Members."

His pastoral counseling was invaluable. "Chaplain Trainer served with me as my pastor, counselor, comrade and prayer warrior," says Army LTC Todd Perkins. "He accepted my personal challenges as his priority and was always available to listen and counsel. His lessons, sermons and advice are a solid foundation for me to reference until and beyond the day that I return home to my family."

To condemn LTC Jon Trainer personally because he was recommended for a Bronze Star for meritorious service in the conduct of his duties in a theater of war is odious. Trainer didn't ask for the award, and given his clear Christian predisposition for humility, I am certain he never would have missed it.

Assassinating the character of a military chaplain -- especially one who has served our country with integrity and has honored his oath "[to Support and Defend](#)" our Constitution -- is inexcusable.

Moving forward, conservatives should vigorously protest the degradation of our Armed Forces capabilities and morale under [Barack Hussein Obama](#), who has demonstrated great disdain for our military men and women as CINC. (The feeling is mutual.) He has [undercut the DoD budget](#) and [undercut Military order](#) by way of a plethora of PC doctrines.



Distinguished Warfare Medal

As for military award inflation, this may be the only issue where Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel excels. He volunteered to join the Army and served in Vietnam as a sergeant with the 9th Infantry Division, where he earned the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, two Purple Hearts, the Army Commendation Medal, and the Combat Infantryman Badge. Unlike his predecessor, Hagel will know how to address the Distinguished Warfare Medal's order of precedence.

Ultimately, the lesson here is that conservative commentators and news sites should, in the words of [Ronald Reagan](#), "trust but verify" reports, even from reputable sources like NRO. We should reject sensationalist tabloid headlines, which have become too common on some self-proclaimed "conservative" websites. The net result of such tabloidism is to foment emotional discord and divert political capital down rat holes.

Obama and his leftist ilk are focused and determined. They are engaged in very serious threats to American

[Liberty](#), and we undermine our unified front to eradicate those threats when some get sidetracked by sensationalized "news" based too often on only a shred of substance. Of course, headlines generating web traffic are important to sites dependent upon ad revenue -- a primary reason that *The Patriot Post* accepts no advertising and is [donor supported](#).

Our best efforts notwithstanding, on rare occasions our editorial team has included information that was factually inaccurate. Fortunately, our readers are quick to let us know, and we are quick to correct those inaccuracies.

Endeavoring to correct the record and stop the character assassination of Jon Trainer, I devoted much of Wednesday morning writing to colleagues, editors of the more widely recognized conservative media outlets, encouraging them to avoid this story, or correct it if already published. I started with NRO's Editor Rich Lowry. On Wednesday afternoon, Lowry [published a clarification](#), concluding, "I wanted to provide this fuller context and take the opportunity to salute Trainer for his service to our country."

We second that salute.