

# Religious Program Specialist awarded Bronze Star

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By JO1(SW) Jason McKnight - Navy Compass

SAN DIEGO - First Marine Expeditionary Force awarded retiring Master Chief Religious Program Specialist (FMF/SW/AW) Ed Jernigan the Bronze Star for combat operations in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom Jun 25 at Murphy Canyon Chapel.

Jernigan said he saw the medal as representative of his 30-year contribution to the Navy and Marine Corps team.

"I had the opportunity to do what a lot of people don't get a chance to do," he said. "And that was support my country in a wartime environment."

Jernigan's certificate was for combat operations in the Middle East from January to July 2003, but this isn't his first time in combat in the area, as he is also a Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm veteran.

"I've been deployed four times (to the Middle East)," said Jernigan. "You get to experience with the Marines what a combat environment is truly like."

Chaplain (Capt.) John Gwudz, 1st MEF, said Jernigan had a calming effect on everyone he encountered.

"Even though war was raging around us, he brought peace," said Gwudz. "One time, when intelligence indicated numerous IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and possible ambushes on our convoy route, I was scared and very concerned."

Gwudz said the religious ministry team was planning two Catholic masses for some units who were going into combat that night, and when Jernigan said they'd make it, he knew they'd be able to do it.

"Master Chief has that kind of comforting effect," said Gwudz.

Jernigan joined the Navy at 17, after having run away from home at 16 and being orphaned at an early age.

When the RP rating was established, he was one of the very first to be converted.

Retirement ceremony guest speaker RPCM(SW/FMF) Harold A. Terry Jr., Chief of Chaplains senior enlisted leader, said that Jernigan was proof that person's circumstances don't dictate a person's future.



Chaplain, Navy Region Southwest Religious Ministry department, presents the Bronze Star