

VFW National Convention - Celebrities, Former JCS Chairman Honored

Aug 17, 2008

ORLANDO, Fla. — At Monday night's banquet, actress Ann Margret as well as Mickey Rooney, received VFW's Hall of Fame Award.

Ann Margret, who participated in Bob Hope's USO tours in Vietnam in 1966 and 1968, said, "You represent the soul of this nation. We are eternally grateful. I give you my deepest respect and admiration." She spoke emotionally about meeting Vietnam veterans so many years ago. "They were just boys doing a man's job," she said. The famed actress spoke proudly of her daughter, who is a psychologist at a VA hospital in Wisconsin where she treats veterans with PTSD. Ann Margret received a hearty applause.

Actor Mickey Rooney, co-recipient of the Hall of Fame Award, made it clear that he was a soldier in the Army and not part of the USO. He recounted his time in WWII in Europe at length. Part of what was called three-man "Jeep tours," he often entertained at the front lines. For a while he was attached to units such as the 82nd Airborne Division. Rooney, a VFW member-at-large in California, told a heartwarming story about an amputee he met overseas and how he affected his later life. Gen. George Patton recommended Rooney for the Bronze Star, the actor said.

"Celebrity! Forget that. I am a soldier who loves his country," he said. In referring to the presidential election, Rooney concluded: "Vote for the best interests of our country."

Former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) retired Marine General Peter Pace received VFW's Eisenhower Award. Pace, a member of VFW Post 1429 in Teaneck, N.J., started his career as a platoon commander with the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, in Vietnam during 1968-69. He retired as JCS chairman in October 2007. He accepted his award on behalf of three groups: American families who encourage their children to volunteer to serve, providing guidance and being mentors; military families of those on duty now; and all those individual Americans who serve today.

Recalling his service in Vietnam, he named those Marines who died following his orders. Pace specifically mentioned one Marine who took a sniper's bullet meant for him near Liberty Bridge on Aug. 18, 1968, saving his life. Pace expressed personal astonishment at the

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fact that he spent 13 months in combat “without ever getting a scratch.”

Discussing current conflicts, Pace said, “It is about fighting so our children and grandchildren also have something worth fighting for.” He pointed out, “The enemy has declared war on us. The question is, where will we take a stand?”

Pace donated his \$15,000 honorarium to the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation. Every penny of the money given to this foundation benefits the children of Marines killed in the line of duty, he said.