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United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown
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STOLEN VALOR: ONE MAN PLEADS GUILTY, ANOTHER CHARGED, FOR BOGUS CLAIMS CONCERNING SILVER STAR MILITARY MEDALS

SACRAMENTO, Calif.— United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown announced today that ERIC GENE PIOTROWSKI, 41, of Elk Grove, pleaded guilty this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Gregory G. Hollows to falsely claiming that he was awarded a Silver Star military decoration during Operation Desert Storm. On Thursday, September 10, 2009, a second man, KENNETH JEROME NELSON, 60, of Sacramento, was charged in a two-count indictment with unauthorized exhibition of military decorations and medals, including a Silver Star, and making a false statement to the FBI concerning his supposed service in Vietnam and his receipt of various medals.

Under the Stolen Valor Act, which was enacted in late 2006, it is a misdemeanor offense to wear military medals that were not in fact awarded, or to falsely claim to have been awarded such medals. The Silver Star is the third highest decoration awarded by the U.S. Military. The PIOTROWSKI case was investigated by the FBI and the California Department of Veterans Affairs. The NELSON case was investigated by the FBI.

U.S. Attorney Brown said, “False claims about military heroism demean the record of the real heroes who have valiantly served this nation in the armed services. Those who seek public attention and admiration by misappropriating the mantle of veterans who have served with distinction deserve prosecution.”

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle Rodriguez, who is prosecuting the PIOTROWSKI case, PIOTROWSKI claimed that he was awarded a Silver Star for “gallantry in action during combat operations against hostile forces” in Operation Desert Storm. Specifically, PIOTROWSKI falsely claimed that in 1991 during an Iraqi counterattack, he “exposed himself to direct enemy fire while providing suppressive fires to cover an antitank team, which was maneuvering to destroy an Iraqi T-62 tank.” In fact, as he admitted in his plea of guilty, PIOTROWSKI did not see military action in Operation Desert Storm; he purchased the Silver Star Citation and medal via the Internet. Under false pretenses, PIOTROWSKI was formally recognized for the Silver Star by the Undersecretary for the California Department of Veterans Affairs in a ceremony in December 2007. Sentencing in the case is scheduled for November 30, 2009 before Judge Hollows.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Camil A. Skipper, who is prosecuting the NELSON case, the indictment alleges that NELSON wore a Silver Star that had not been awarded to him. The indictment also alleges that NELSON, during an investigation by the FBI, falsely claimed to have earned three Purple Hearts in Vietnam. According to the indictment, NELSON falsely stated that he had earned his third Purple Heart after he stepped on a spike and

received an ankle wound while carrying an injured fellow soldier on his back for 26 miles. The indictment alleges that NELSON did not serve in any combat role with the U.S. Military in Vietnam or elsewhere and that he did not receive any decorations or medals. NELSON, who is known by many as an unofficial caretaker of the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial, has been featured in local television and newspaper stories in which he was described as a former Marine who served in Vietnam for three years and received medals for valor. The charges against NELSON are only allegations and he is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

In another case prosecuted under the Stolen Valor Act, MICHAEL ALLAN FRASER, 63, of Oroville, pleaded guilty in May 2008 to violating the Stolen Valor Act, and was sentenced to serve 100 hours of community service and a fine of \$500. FRASER had given an interview to the Oroville Mercury Register in which he falsely claimed to have been awarded two Purple Hearts and two Bronze Stars for heroism in Vietnam. He had traveled to Vietnam with real Vietnam veterans, who believed he was helping them to “bury the ghosts” of the past. In fact, FRASER never served in Vietnam or received such medals.

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