

U.S. Marine commander receives South Carolina's highest award

Colonel Steven Bernard Vitali receives Order of the Palmetto

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, USA, March 29, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Governor Henry McMaster presented the Order of the Palmetto, S.C.'s highest award, to Col. Steven B. Vitali, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.) during a ceremony attended by 50-plus guests – friends, family, and State House officials – at the Governor's office in the S.C. State House, Thursday, March 28.

Vitali received the award for his exceptionally distinguished service both to the state and nation including his leadership as chief operations officer of the S.C. Floodwater Commission's National Security Task Force, his membership and work as an inductee in the prestigious S.C. Black Belt Hall of Fame, a member of the Fort Jackson (S.C.) Retirees Council, a member of the Marine Corps Film Collection Advisory Council at the University of South Carolina, his service including chairmanships on various other boards and councils, his service as a high school wrestling coach, and most importantly a 35-year career in the U.S. Marine Corps.

While with the Marines, Vitali commanded both U.S. and foreign forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. For several months in 2006, he was the senior U.S. military advisor in Afghanistan and the only Marine maneuver element commander in that country.

Commanding forces through several extremely volatile crises during the war including a citywide uprising in Kabul in which he had to declare martial law on the city, and later surviving an Army Black Hawk helicopter crash in the Hindu Kush mountains, Vitali is best known for standing atop a cliff and shouting at the Taliban: "Come and fight me!"



Gov. Henry McMaster looks toward Col. Steve Vitali as Vitali thanks the approximately 50 attendees following the awards presentation, Mar. 28, 2024. In the foreground, Vitali's five-year-old grandson Liam Blich looks on.

According to Vitali's friend and fellow recipient of the Order of the Palmetto, Col. W. Thomas Smith Jr.: "Steve's service to the state is unmatched. His service to the nation is nothing short of legendary. And his humility in all of it is a model of how leaders are supposed to lead. He's certainly been an example to me."

An article in THE SOUTHERN EDGE magazine (May 2021) referred to Vitali as "one of the most dangerous combatant leaders on the planet," adding, "...but who would know?"

Recipients of the Order of the Palmetto attending Vitali's ceremony included Smith; retired Richland County Coroner Frank Barron, who nominated Vitali; global expedition leader Dr. Tom Mullikin; and Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott.

Smith and Mullikin both supported Barron's nomination of Vitali with letters to the Governor in 2023, as did Maj. Gen. George Goldsmith and Col. Bill Connor, both of whom are also recipients of the Order of the Palmetto.

S.C. Attorney General Alan Wilson also supported Vitali's nomination with a letter of recommendation to the Governor.

Established by S.C. Gov. John C. West in 1971, the Order of the Palmetto is the State of South Carolina's highest award.

According to the Governor's office application, "It is presented in recognition of a lifetime of extraordinary achievement, service, and contributions on a national or statewide scale. The Order of the Palmetto recognizes individuals who have selflessly given of their time, resources and goodwill through a variety of different causes and pursuits to the benefit of their neighbors, fellow citizens and the fabric and prosperity of South Carolina. Business, political or personal accomplishment may be important factors, but noble works for others mark the true purpose."

– For additional information about the Order of the Palmetto and lesser gubernatorial awards and honors, please visit <https://governor.sc.gov/executive-branch/awards>.

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