



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Senator Stewart-Cousins Inducts Pleasantville Native into New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS June 14, 2011

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Colonel Theresa Mercado- Sconzo Sent to Abu Ghraib to Restore Honor to United States After Prisoner Abuse Scandal

(Albany)- Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D/I/WF- 35th District) inducted Colonel Theresa Mercado-Sconzo (United State Army Nursing Corp) into the New York State Senate Veteran's Hall of Fame at a ceremony today in Albany. Colonel Mercado-Sconzo, of Pleasantville, NY,

was deployed to Abu Ghraib prison in March of 2005 to serve as officer in charge of the detainee camps and emergency room shortly after the prisoner abuse and torture scandal was exposed.

Colonel Mercado-Sconzo's mission at Abu Ghraib was to restore liberty to Iraq and restore honor to the United States. Her main responsibility was to oversee medical treatment at the facility's emergency room. Her patients included Iraqi civilians and U.S. soldiers but most were detainees of Abu Ghraib. "Our job was to provide care, oftentimes for Iraqis that had been detained. We really kept our focus on providing medical care and not on why our patients were there," said Col. Mercado-Sconzo. She added that most of the injuries sustained by her patients came from IEDs, mortars and gunshots.

Colonel Mercado-Sconzo says she never witnessed prisoner abuse while serving at Abu Ghraib. "All of us in the unit knew that we would be under the microscope," she said. "We were very cognizant that if we saw anything abnormal, we were to report it up the chain of command."

The Colonel returned home in July of 2006, but she was redeployed to Iraq in November of 2007. During her second tour of duty, she served in the Civil Affairs Unit as Action Officer/Deputy Team leader in Mosul, Iraq. Her orders were to coordinate missions from the Central Iraqi Government in Baghdad to the provincial governments in the north. Her unit reported directly to General David Patreaus. She returned home from that tour of duty in June 2009.

Senator Stewart-Cousins says she nominated Colonel Mercado-Sconzo to the Veteran's Hall of Fame because of her remarkable service in the face of adversity. "The Abu Ghraib scandal was a dreadful stain on our history, but it is very telling that the U.S. Army Reserve Nursing Corps looked to Colonel Mercado-Sconzo to restore honor to the United States in that very difficult moment. It is remarkable that she was able to do what she did under those

circumstances,” said Senator Stewart-Cousins. “This is just a small token of our appreciation for her service and sacrifice.”

Colonel Mercado-Sconzo was born in Brooklyn in 1955, and lived at the Saint Joseph’s Foster Home for many years before moving in with her married older sister. She graduated from Bayside High School in 1973 and continued on to become a registered nurse at Caledonia Brooklyn Hospital. She took her oath into the United States Army Reserve Nursing Corps after receiving a direct commission in 1987.

“It is extraordinary that this girl from a foster home in Brooklyn, grew up to become a Colonel in the US Army Reserve Nursing Corps and served her country so honorably at a time when we needed her the most,” said Senator Stewart-Cousins. “I truly admire Colonel Mercado-Sconzo for all that she has accomplished and I am proud to have had the opportunity to recognize her in the Senate.”

Senator Stewart-Cousins added that she was particularly proud to induct a nurse into the Veteran’s Hall of Fame. “Our combat nurses not only treat wounded US troops, but they also treat civilians and even enemy detainees. They represent the compassion of the United States around the world and it is important that they are shown appreciation that is equal to their service.”

Later that day, Senator Stewart-Cousins passed a resolution recognizing the United States Cadet Nurse Corps, which was created in 1943 to address the severe shortage of stateside nurses that existed during World War II. In just 5 years (from 1943-1948), the Cadet Nurse Corps program helped nursing schools throughout the United States train over 180,000 nurses to serve in the nation’s civilian and military hospitals.

“The Cadet Nurses were an integral part of the war effort during World War II, and I thought it was important that they were finally recognized. And it was especially appropriate that we honored them on the same day as we honored Colonel Mercado-Sconzo because it really underlines the vital role that nurses play in our nation’s history,” the Senator concluded.

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