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BIOGRAPHY

Trooper Mark Gregor Strang Donaldson, VC ***Special Air Service Regiment***

8248070 Trooper Mark Gregor Strang Donaldson has been awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia for most conspicuous acts of gallantry in action in a circumstance of great peril in Afghanistan as part of the Special Operations Task Group during Operation SLIPPER, Oruzgan Province, Afghanistan.

Mark Donaldson was born in Waratah, Newcastle, New South Wales, on 2 April 1979. He spent his formative years in northern New South Wales where he graduated from high school in 1996. He enlisted in the Australian Army on 18 June 2002 and undertook recruit training at the Army Recruit Training Centre, Kapooka, New South Wales. He demonstrated an early aptitude for soldiering and was awarded the prizes for best shot and best at physical training in his platoon. Subsequently, he was allocated to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps and posted to the School of Infantry at Singleton, New South Wales, where he excelled in his initial employment training. At the completion of this training he was again awarded best shot and best at physical training, as well as the award for the most outstanding soldier in his platoon. He was posted to 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, Townsville, Queensland, in November 2002 and, while there, decided to pursue his ambition to join the Special Air Service Regiment.

In February 2004, he successfully completed the Special Air Service Regiment selection course and was posted to the regiment in May 2004. He was then posted to I Troop, 3 Special Air Service Squadron. Since that time he has been deployed on operations to East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq.

On 12 August 2008, Trooper Donaldson was wounded in action whilst conducting nighttime operations in Oruzgan Province, Afghanistan. He recovered from his minor wounds and continued on the deployment. He was involved in another engagement in Oruzgan Province on 2 September 2008 which resulted



in him being awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia. He was invested by Her Excellency the Governor-General of Australia at Government House, Canberra, on 16 January 2009.

Trooper Donaldson remains posted to the Special Air Service Regiment in Perth, Western Australia. He is married to Emma and has a daughter Kaylee. His parents are deceased.



Victoria Cross Citation

On 2 September 2008, during the conduct of a fighting patrol, Trooper Donaldson was travelling in a combined Afghan, United States and Australian vehicle convoy that was engaged by a numerically superior, entrenched and coordinated enemy ambush. The ambush was initiated by a high volume of sustained machine gun fire coupled with the effective use of rocket propelled grenades. Such was the effect of the initiation that the combined patrol suffered numerous casualties, completely lost the initiative and became immediately suppressed. It was over two hours before the convoy was able to establish a clean break and move to an area free of enemy fire.

In the early stages of the ambush, Trooper Donaldson reacted spontaneously to regain the initiative. He moved rapidly between alternate positions of cover engaging the enemy with 66mm and 84mm anti-armour weapons as well as his M4 rifle. During an early stage of the enemy ambush, he deliberately exposed himself to enemy fire in order to draw attention to himself and thus away from wounded soldiers. This selfless act alone bought enough time for those wounded to be moved to relative safety.

As the enemy had employed the tactic of a rolling ambush, the patrol was forced to conduct numerous vehicle manoeuvres, under intense enemy fire, over a distance of approximately four kilometres to extract the convoy from the engagement area. Compounding the extraction was the fact that casualties had consumed all available space within the vehicles. Those who had not been wounded, including Trooper Donaldson, were left with no option but to run beside the vehicles throughout.

During the conduct of this vehicle manoeuvre to extract the convoy from the engagement area, a severely wounded coalition force interpreter was inadvertently left behind. Of his own volition and displaying complete disregard for his own safety, Trooper Donaldson moved alone, on foot, across approximately 80 metres of exposed ground to recover the wounded interpreter. His movement, once identified by the enemy, drew intense and accurate machine gun fire from entrenched positions. Upon reaching the wounded coalition force interpreter, Trooper Donaldson picked him up and carried him back to the relative safety of the vehicles, then provided immediate first aid, before returning to the fight.

On subsequent occasions during the battle, Trooper Donaldson administered medical care to other wounded soldiers, whilst continually engaging the enemy.

Trooper Donaldson's acts of exceptional gallantry in the face of accurate and sustained enemy fire ultimately saved the life of a coalition force interpreter and ensured the safety of the other members of the combined Afghan, United States and Australian force. Trooper Donaldson's actions on this day displayed exceptional courage in circumstances of great peril. His actions are of the highest accord and are in keeping with the finest traditions of the Special Operations Command, the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force.

The Victoria Cross

The Victoria Cross is the pre-eminent award for acts of bravery in wartime and is Australia's highest military honour. It is awarded to persons who, in the presence of the enemy, display the most conspicuous gallantry; a daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice; or extreme devotion to duty. The Governor-General awards the Victoria Cross, with the approval of the Sovereign, on the recommendation of the Minister for Defence. It may be awarded posthumously.

The Victoria Cross was created by Queen Victoria in 1856 and made retrospective to 1854 to cover the period of the Crimean War. Until the Victoria Cross for Australia was created in 1991, Australians were eligible for the Victoria Cross and other awards under the Imperial system of honours. The Imperial Victoria Cross was awarded to 96 Australians, of whom 91 received it while serving with Australian forces and five while serving with South African or British units. These Australians were awarded the Victoria Cross in the following conflicts:

- Boer War (1899-1902) – 6;
- World War I (1914-1918) – 64;
- North Russia (1919) – 2;
- World War II (1939-1945) – 20; and
- Vietnam (1962-1972) – 4.

The Victoria Cross for Australia, which has replaced the Imperial Victoria Cross, was instituted in the Australian honours system by Letters Patent on 15 January 1991. To date, Trooper Donaldson is the only person to have been awarded it.

The Victoria Cross is designed in the form of the Maltese Cross, in the centre of which is a lion guardant standing upon the Royal Crown. The words "For valour" are inscribed below. The cross is suspended from a bar by a crimson ribbon. On the reverse of the cross, the date of the act of bravery is inscribed, along with the name, rank, and unit of the recipient.

Department of Defence¹

¹This is an edited extract of material that was first published on the Department of Defence website on 16 January 2009 [www.defence.gov.au].