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DEFENCE NEWS

Victoria Cross awarded to Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith



Coporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, Special Air Service Regiment, was awarded the Victoria Cross on 23 January 2011 for the most conspicuous gallantry in action in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, on 11 June 2010. He had previously been awarded the Medal for Gallantry (MG) for his actions in Afghanistan in 2006. The 32-year-old is married with two children. He is the 98th Australian to have been awarded the Victoria Cross since its inception and the second to have been awarded the Australian Victoria Cross.



On 11 June 2010, a troop of which Corporal Roberts-Smith was a patrol second-in-command, conducted a helicopter assault into Tizak, Kandahar Province, to capture or kill a senior Taliban commander. Upon insertion, the troop was engaged by machine-gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire from multiple, dominating positions. Two soldiers were wounded and the troop was pinned down by three machine guns in an elevated fortified position to the south of the village.

Under the cover of close air support, suppressive small-arms and machine-gun fire, the patrol manoeuvred to within 70 metres of the enemy position from which it drew very heavy, intense, effective and sustained fire. The patrol fought towards the enemy position until, at a range of 40 metres, the weight of fire prevented further movement forward. At this point, Corporal Roberts-Smith identified the opportunity to exploit some cover provided by a small structure.

As he approached the structure, Corporal Roberts-Smith observed an insurgent grenadier in the throes of engaging his patrol and instinctively engaged the insurgent at point-blank range, killing him. With his patrol still pinned down by the three enemy machine guns, he exposed his position to draw fire away from the patrol, enabling them to bring fire to bear against the enemy. His patrol commander threw a grenade and silenced one of the machine guns. Seizing the advantage, Corporal Roberts-Smith, with a total disregard for his own safety, stormed the enemy position killing the two remaining machine gunners.

This enabled his patrol to break into the enemy position and lift the fire from the remainder of the troop which had been pinned down by the machine guns. Corporal Roberts-Smith continued to assault enemy positions in depth, during which he and a colleague killed further enemy. His acts of selfless valour directly enabled his troop to go on and clear the village of Tizak of Taliban. This decisive engagement subsequently caused the remainder of the Taliban in Shah Wali Kot District to retreat from the area.

Department of Defence