

## **Australian Army**

### **Awarded the Medal for Gallantry**

#### **Lance Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith**

#### **Citation**

For gallantry in action in hazardous circumstances as a patrol sniper in the Special Operations Task Group – Task Force 637, whilst deployed on Operation SLIPPER Rotation Three Afghanistan, May – September 2006.

On the night of 31st May 2006, Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith was employed as a patrol scout and sniper in a patrol which was tasked with establishing an Observation Post near the Chora Pass in extremely rugged terrain overlooking an Anti Coalition Militia sanctuary. Early in the patrol, after an arduous ten hour foot infiltration up the side of a mountain, the patrol was required to coordinate offensive air support to assist a combined Special Operations Task Group and other Special Forces patrol that were in contact with the Anti Coalition Militia in the valley floor to their north. Following this engagement the patrol remained in the Observation Post to continue providing vital information on the Anti Coalition Militia in the area. This comprehensive reporting had a significant effect on shaping the local area for the subsequent coalition forces operation.

On the 2nd June, the Observation Post had become the focus of the Anti Coalition Militia force and repeated attempts to locate and surround the position ensued. In one particular incident the Militia attempted to outflank the Observation Post. Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith was part of a two man team tasked to move out of their relatively secure Observation Post in order to locate and neutralize the Militia and regain the initiative. This task was successfully achieved.

In another incident, two Anti Coalition Militia attempted to attack the Observation Post from a different flank, Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith again moved to support and neutralize one of these Militia. Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith then realized that the forward edge of the Observation Post was not secure and made the decision to split the team and take up an exposed position forward of the patrol so he could effectively employ his sniper weapon. Whilst isolated, and in his precarious position, he observed a group of sixteen Anti Coalition Militia advancing across open ground towards the Observation Post. Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith effectively employed his sniper rifle to stop their advance whilst receiving very accurate small arms fire from another group of Militia to his flank.

Through his efforts, Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith maintained the initiative and ensured that his patrol remained secure by holding this position without support for twenty minutes. He was eventually reinforced by his original team member and together they continued to hold off the Militia advance for a further twenty minutes until offensive air support arrived.

Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith's actions on the 2nd June 2006, whilst under heavy Anti Coalition Militia fire and in a precarious position, threatened by a numerically superior force, are testament to his courage, tenacity and sense of duty to his patrol. His display of gallantry in disregarding his own personal safety in maintaining an exposed sniper position under sustained fire with a risk of being surrounded by the Anti Coalition Militia was outstanding. His actions, in order to safeguard his patrol, were of the highest order and in keeping with the finest traditions of Special Operations Command Australia, the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force.

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## The Victoria Cross

### Significance

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.

### History

The Victoria Cross was created by Queen Victoria in 1856 and made retrospective to 1854 to cover the period of the Crimea 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 has been awarded to ninety six Australians. Ninety one received the Victoria Cross while others serving with Australian forces and five Australians received the award while serving with South African and British units.

Australians were first recognized for their gallantry in the Boer War and more recently during the Vietnam War.

Australians have been awarded the Victoria Cross in the following conflicts:

- 6 in the Boer War 1899-1902
- 64 in World War I 1914-1918
- 2 in North Russia 1919
- 20 in World War II 1939-1945
- 4 in Vietnam 1962-1972

Nine of the crosses awarded in World War I were for Australians at Gallipoli.

### Past recipients

Ninety six Australians have been awarded the Imperial Victoria Cross. No recipients had been awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia.

The first Australian to be awarded a Victoria Cross was Captain Sir Neville Howse VC KCMG CB KStJ during the Boer War (1900). He also served in World War I and later as Commonwealth Minister for Health, Defence and Repatriation.

The most recent recipient of the Victoria Cross was [Warrant Officer Keith Payne VC OAM](#) for gallantry during the Vietnam War (24 May 1969). Under heavy enemy fire Payne instigated a daring rescue of more than forty men, many of them wounded, and led the party back to the battalion base.

### Victoria Cross for Australia

The Victoria Cross for Australia was instituted in the Australian honours system by Letters Patent on 15 January 1991.

It replaced the British or Imperial Victoria Cross. [Corporal Mark Donaldson](#) has been awarded the first Victoria Cross for Australia.

### **How it is awarded**

The Governor-General awards the Victoria Cross, with the approval of the Sovereign, on the recommendation of the Minister for Defence.

The Victoria Cross may be awarded posthumously.

The post-nominal entitlement for the Victoria Cross is VC.

A subsequent award of the Victoria Cross to the same person is made as a bar to the Cross. They are also entitled to the post-nominal VC and Bar.

### **Medal design**



The Victoria Cross is designed in the form of the Maltese Cross: in the centre of the medal is a lion guardant standing upon the Royal Crown.

The words "For valour" are inscribed below. The Victoria 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.

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## **The Chief of the Defence Force congratulates Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, VC, MG**

The Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, today congratulated Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith on being awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia.

Speaking at the Investiture Ceremony at Campbell Barracks in Perth, Air Chief Marshal Houston said Corporal Roberts-Smith had brought great credit to himself, the Australian Army, the Special Air Service Regiment and the Australian Defence Force.

"Today, we in the military feel great admiration and respect for the extreme valour shown by Corporal Roberts-Smith and we are honoured to call him one of our own," Air Chief Marshal Houston said.

"In choosing to serve our nation, the men and women of the Australian Defence Force display courage, initiative and self-sacrifice every day. But in Afghanistan on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, Corporal Roberts-Smith went far beyond what we would ordinarily expect.

“In the most dangerous and demanding of situations – when his patrol was outnumbered and his life and the lives of his mates were under extreme threat – Corporal Roberts-Smith cast aside concern for his own safety. He placed his mates’ lives above his own.”

Air Chief Marshal Houston said that within the military it was a mark of the utmost respect that all, no matter their rank, saluted a Victoria Cross recipient.

“It is a great source of delight to me that, as of today, there are now two serving members of the Australian Defence Force I have the great honour to salute,”  
Air Chief Marshal Houston said.

“Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, VC, MG, we are enormously proud of you.”

Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie remarked on the tremendous humility shown by Corporal Roberts-Smith.

“All Australian Soldiers should feel tremendously proud of the actions of Corporal Roberts-Smith, and the recognition that the award of the Victoria Cross represents. The valour of his actions and those of the other members of his patrol, are exemplars of the very best in Australian soldiering,” Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie said.

“He is a soldier who embodies Army’s values of Courage, Initiative, and Teamwork and the ethos of the Special Air Service Regiment. He is held in the highest esteem by his peers, subordinates and superiors alike for his personal attributes and his professionalism.

Corporal Roberts-Smith said he was honoured and humbled.

“I am so very proud to have taken part in the action with my mates. This award also belongs to them and to the Regiment,” Corporal Roberts-Smith said.

“To my family, my beautiful wife Emma and our baby girls, Eve and Elizabeth, thank you for your enduring support and encouragement.”

### **Media Note:**

Corporal Robert’s Smith’s citation and biography are available at  
[http://www.defence.gov.au/special\\_events/Roberts-Smith/index.htm](http://www.defence.gov.au/special_events/Roberts-Smith/index.htm)

Corporal Robert’s Smith’s portrait is available at  
<http://111.125.172.46/fotoweb/Grid.fwx?archiveId=5000&search=20111696>

### **Pool Arrangements:**

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