

THE NEW ZEALAND GALLANTRY DECORATION (N.Z.G.D.)

Leon Kristopher SMITH (T1002840)

The late Lance Corporal, 1 New Zealand Special Air Service Group

Date of action: 19 August 2011

Date of award: 20 April 2013

Note: Lance Corporal Smith was killed in action in Afghanistan on 28 September 2011.

Background

Lance Corporal Smith enlisted in the New Zealand Army on 23 August 2005. He completed NZSAS selection in 2006 and became a badged member of the NZSAS in 2007.

Prior to the events described below, he had served on Operation Watea over the period January – October 2010 and started his second tour of duty in early August 2011.

Citation

On 19 August 2011 Lance Corporal Smith, as a member of the NZSAS Task Force, responded to an insurgent attack on the British Council Offices in the centre of Kabul, Afghanistan. Five insurgents used a Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device to gain entry into the British Council Offices. Having made entry into the compound they manoeuvred themselves into a strong defensive position where they could rain down small arms fire and rockets and ultimately detonate suicide vests against the rescue force. This incident was complex in nature. Not only was the enemy determined and well-equipped, five British nationals were also isolated within the compound.

Lance Corporal Smith arrived on the scene with other members of the NZSAS who were supporting the Afghan Crisis Response Unit (CRU). As part of a supporting plan Lance Corporal Smith moved into an over-watch position 30 metres away from the insurgents' stronghold. The NZSAS personnel, including Lance Corporal Smith, began to prepare a plan to rescue the hostages and to assist the CRU to clear the compound of insurgents.

At approximately 11.35 am (local time) Corporal Grant, another member of the Task Force, moved across the backyard of the target building to link up with other NZSAS members. Whilst rushing up a stairwell Corporal Grant was mortally wounded by insurgent fire. Initially it was not known where Corporal Grant had fallen or what condition he was in.

With no concern for his personal safety, Lance Corporal Smith pushed into an exposed position to view and confirm Corporal Grant's exact location. Lance Corporal Smith saw Corporal Grant lying inside a small structure slightly above him at the top of some stairs. Without hesitation Lance Corporal Smith requested to move to Corporal Grant's position in order to render first aid, but was told by his Troop Commander to wait for a ballistic shield. During this period Lance Corporal Smith's position was receiving a significant volume of insurgent machine gun and rifle fire.

Once Lance Corporal Smith received the ballistic shield, he took two deep breaths, gave his Troop Commander a positive nod and the 'GO' call was issued. Covering fire from over-watch positions was directed towards the insurgents as Lance Corporal Smith jumped into the fray. Once again without thought for his personal safety, he leapt over a wall and across exposed and open ground and up the same stairs where Corporal Grant had been shot. All the while, insurgent bullets were impacting around him. Lance Corporal Smith threw himself into the room where Corporal Grant lay and then, with cool and professional resolve, began providing immediate medical treatment. Corporal Grant was not yet confirmed dead and Lance Corporal Smith, an SAS medic, applied first aid to the wound and commenced CPR, which he continued to administer until Corporal Grant was evacuated from the building in the care of the Task Force medic. To evacuate Corporal Grant safely, Lance Corporal Smith had to call for other Task Force members to knock a hole in the brick wall of the building that he and Corporal Grant were in. Lance Corporal Smith then calmly returned to the fight. During this stage he again exposed himself to enemy fire so that he could engage the insurgents effectively. He then took part in blowing a large hole in the outer wall of the compound so that he and other members of the Task Force could minimise the open ground they had to cover to get to the panic room where the British captives were hiding. Lance Corporal Smith then provided covering fire as the captives were rushed to safety through the compound wall.

Throughout the entire incident Lance Corporal Smith displayed extreme calmness under pressure, tremendous personal bravery, and the utmost professionalism whilst under continuous insurgent fire. As a result of Lance Corporal Smith's actions Corporal Grant received the best medical treatment possible, the Task Force was able to recover all five British nationals alive and the insurgent threat was neutralised.