



**Message from the Office of the State Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Issue 95 (25 January, 2011)**

Please find below a message from Bill Denny AM, Director, Veterans SA for your information, distribution and possible use in newsletters, and on "Veterans" themed radio programs.

Award of second VC in Afghanistan

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon. Jack Snelling M.P., congratulates Cpl Ben Roberts-Smith on his award of the Victoria Cross for action in Afghanistan in 2010.

Corporal Roberts-Smith's patrol was involved in a fierce fire-fight while deployed in Kandahar Province. The patrol was pinned down by intense fire from three machine gun positions. Cpl Roberts-Smith drew fire away from other members of his patrol before storming two of the machine gun positions and killing the occupants.

In a modest response to the award Cpl Roberts-Smith acknowledged his mates - those who had volunteered and didn't come back. He commented "They're our mates and their families live with that (loss) every day." He also acknowledged the other members of his patrol and their gallantry during the same contact.

The award of the Victoria Cross to Cpl Roberts-Smith takes the total VCs awarded since World War II in Vietnam and Afghanistan to six. Every one of those awards was consequent upon great acts of courage. However, a closer reading of each citation shows that in each case "compassion" revealed itself as well. All those men took lives, but in every case they entered the fray with the specific intention of saving the lives of their mates. We all know about Kevin "Dasher" Wheatley, who refused to leave his dying mate, Warrant Officer Ron Swanton, even though he knew that to remain with him meant certain death.

The awards to Major Peter Badcoe, Warrant Officer Ray Simpson and Warrant Officer Keith Payne showed similar characteristics. Of course Afghanistan is an entirely different conflict, but we all know the story of Trooper Mark Donaldson and how he put his life at risk for his mates and an Afghan interpreter he had only known for five days! The award to Cpl Roberts-Smith is in a similar mould.

What does this tell us about Australian soldiers? I suggest it tells us that a blend of courage and compassion permeate widely within our Defence Force and always has. Moreover, I think it says that "courage and compassion" with "mateship" are the hallmarks of all Australians who have served.

All South Australians congratulate Cpl Roberts-Smith. We are truly proud of him, his mates and all that they do in our name. Like him we especially remember those who gave their lives and the families they left behind.

Veterans' Advisory Council (V.A.C.)

The first V.A.C. meeting for 2011 will be held on 17 February.

Veterans SA wish to apologise to Jennifer Dowling for the wording of the 11 January Minister's Message that said she had "chosen to step down" from the V.A.C.

Although Jennifer was keen to continue to serve, she kindly agreed to step aside in favour of her President, Jan Wallent as part of the process of ensuring a vital V.A.C. open to new ideas.

This Week in Australian Military History

Did you know that?

On 25 January, 1942 full mobilisation was ordered in Australia. The imminent threat of a Japanese invasion of Australia necessitated this increased commitment from the Government and the population.

For more information about any of the items mentioned, please contact Simon at Veterans SA on 8226 8541.