



FOR PRESS:

P. M. No. 70/1969

AWARD OF VICTORIA CROSS FOR GALLANTRY
IN VIETNAM

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Her Majesty The Queen has awarded the Victoria Cross to a member of the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam, Warrant Officer Class 2 Rayene Stewart Simpson, D. C. M.

Warrant Officer Simpson displayed outstanding heroism on two separate occasions during an operation with a mobile strike force in Kontum Province in May this year.

A veteran of the Second World War, Korea, and the Malayan Emergency, Warrant Officer Simpson came originally from Chippendale in New South Wales. He is still serving with the Training Team in Vietnam.

Warrant Officer Simpson's repeated acts of personal bravery in last May's operation were an inspiration to all Vietnamese, United States and Australian soldiers who served with him. His conspicuous gallantry was in the highest tradition of the Australian Army.

I have sent Warrant Officer Simpson the following message:-

"On behalf of the Commonwealth Government, my colleagues and I offer you our most sincere congratulations on the award of the Victoria Cross bestowed on you by Her Majesty The Queen. Australia is proud of you. Your exceptional valour and leadership while serving as an adviser of the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam must be an inspiration to all Australians."

CANBERRA
21 August 1969

Note: Attached:- Details of Warrant Officer Simpson's actions.
Personal background on Warrant Officer Simpson.

BACKGROUND TO V.C. AWARD

Details of Action:

On 6 May 1969 Warrant Officer Simpson was serving as a company commander in a Mobile Strike Force Battalion on a search and clear operation in Kontum Province. When one of his platoons became heavily engaged with the enemy, he led the remainder of his company to its assistance. The enemy who were equipped with automatic weapons and grenades were in strong defensive positions and well protected by the covering fire of other troops dispersed about their positions. Disregarding the dangers involved, he placed himself at the front of his troops, thus becoming a focal point of enemy fire, and personally led the assault on the left flank of the enemy position.

As the company moved forward, an Australian warrant officer commanding one of the platoons was seriously wounded and the attack began to falter. Warrant Officer Simpson, at great personal risk and under heavy fire, rushed across open ground to the wounded warrant officer and carried him to a position of safety. He then returned to his company where, with complete disregard for his safety, he crawled forward to within ten metres of the enemy and threw grenades into their positions.

As darkness fell, Warrant Officer Simpson realised he could not break into the enemy position. He ordered his company to withdraw and threw smoke grenades as a protective cover. Then, carrying a wounded platoon leader and with the assistance of five Vietnamese soldiers, he covered the withdrawal of his company.

Mr. Gorton said his leadership and personal bravery throughout this action were outstanding.

On 11 May in the same operation, Warrant Officer Simpson's Battalion Commander was killed and an Australian warrant officer and several Vietnamese soldiers were wounded. In addition, one other Australian warrant officer who had been separated from most of his troops had been pinned down by enemy fire. Warrant Officer Simpson quickly organised two platoons of Vietnamese soldiers and several advisers and led them to the position of the contact.

On reaching the position, the element with Warrant Officer Simpson came under heavy fire and all but a few of the soldiers with him fell back. Disregarding his own safety, he moved forward in the face of accurate enemy machine gun fire in order to cover the initial evacuation of the casualties. The wounded were eventually moved out of the line of fire, most of which was being directed at Warrant Officer Simpson from close range. In the words of one American eye-witness, "The whole area was sprayed. Warrant Officer Simpson's area caught the full blast and the tree he was beside was ripped apart. His leadership and encouragement motivated myself and others so the wounded were pulled out safely."

At what appeared to be the risk of almost certain death he made several attempts to move forward to recover his Battalion' Commander's body, but on each occasion was stopped by heavy accurate fire. Realising the position was becoming untenable and that priority should be given to extricating all casualties as quickly as possible, Warrant Officer Simpson alone and still under enemy fire, covered the withdrawal of the wounded by keeping himself between them and the enemy. He fought on and by his outstanding courage prevented the enemy advancing until the wounded were removed from the immediate vicinity.

The Prime Minister said Warrant Officer Simpson's gallant and individual action and his coolness under prolonged fire were exceptional and were instrumental in achieving the successful evacuation of the wounded to a helicopter evacuation pad.

Personal Background:

Rayene Stewart Simpson was born at Chippendale, New South Wales on 16 February 1926. He enlisted in the AIF on 15 March 1944 and served overseas in Morotai, Tarakan, and Rabaul. He was discharged on 9 January 1947 and subsequently re-enlisted on 17 January 1951.

During his second enlistment, Warrant Officer Simpson served in Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam. During his second tour with the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam he was wounded in action in October 1964 and was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for bravery.

Warrant Officer Simpson was discharged on 16 May 1966 but again re-enlisted on 2 May 1967 and has served continuously with the Training Team in Vietnam since that date.

His Decorations and Medals are: Victoria Cross, Distinguished Conduct Medal, Pacific Star, War Medal 1939-45, Australia Service Medal 1939-45, Korea Medal, United Nations Service Medal (Korea), General Service Medal with Malaya Clasp, Vietnam Medal, and Vietnamese Campaign Medal.

Warrant Officer Simpson is married and his wife resides at 5-30-1 Chome Yayoicho-Nakano-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

95th V.C.:

Warrant Officer Simpson's award is the 95th Victoria Cross awarded to an Australian and is the third since World War II.

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The last two awards were made to the late Warrant Officer Kevin Arthur Wheatley for action in Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnam on 13 November 1965 and to the late Major Peter John Badcoe for his actions between February and April 1967 in South Vietnam.
