

FOR PRESS:



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VICTORIA CROSS FOR GALLANTRY IN VIETNAM

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

Her Majesty the Queen has bestowed posthumously the award of the Victoria Cross upon a member of the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam, the late Major Peter John Badcoe, of Canberra.

Major Badcoe, who was born in South Australia in 1934, graduated from the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, in December, 1952. He served with the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam from August, 1966, until his death on 7th April, 1967.

Major Badcoe displayed outstanding heroism on three separate occasions between February and April of this year.

On 23rd February, while acting as an advisor to a Vietnamese Regional Force Company, Major Badcoe moved across 600 metres of fire-swept terrain to save an American officer's life. In the subsequent successful assault on the enemy post he personally killed the machine gunners directly in front of him. He then personally recovered, still under enemy fire, the body of another American officer.

His actions during this encounter gave impetus to the Vietnamese offensive, saved the life of one officer and prevented the Viet Cong from capturing the body of the other.

On 7th March, Major Badcoe personally led a Vietnamese Company in an attack over open terrain to assault and capture a heavily defended enemy position. His courage and leadership, when death and heavy losses were certain, turned defeat into victory and prevented the enemy from capturing the district headquarters. His actions were a major contributing factor to the defeat of a numerically superior enemy force.

On 7th April, Major Badcoe was on an operation with a Vietnamese Reaction Company in the Huong Tra district. The Company under heavy attack withdrew to cover leaving Major Badcoe and his radio operator under heavy mortar fire about 50 metres ahead of the leading elements. Major Badcoe returned and led the Company forward again. He continued on and prepared to throw grenades. He stood up and exposed himself as he prepared to throw. On the first occasion he was pulled down by his radio operator because of concentrated fire. On his second attempt to throw a grenade he again exposed himself and was killed by machine gun fire. Friendly artillery was then called in and the position was captured.

His gallant actions before the enemy were the motivating force which inspired the Company to launch a third assault and overrun an enemy force of superior strength.

The American servicemen who were witnesses of Major Badcoe's gallant actions emphasise that he knew that almost certain death could be expected in face of the hail of enemy fire, and that they saw no possibility of his survival. His personal valour and unhesitant response to the needs of his comrades-in-arms were an inspiration for the attacking forces. His presence of mind and demonstrated professional competence led to the defeat of an enemy who enjoyed every tactical advantage. Statements by the Americans all agree that Major Badcoe's actions brought great credit upon himself and the Australian Army.

Major Badcoe's outstanding bravery and leadership and subordination of his personal safety were in the highest traditions of military service. His selfless courage has set an example worthy to be long remembered in the story of Australia's fighting men.

CANBERRA
16th October, 1967

The Prime Minister today sent the following letter to the late Major Badcoe's widow:

"Dear Mrs. Badcoe,

Today I have the honour of making the announcement that Her Majesty the Queen has given Her approval to the award of the Victoria Cross to your late husband, Major Peter John Badcoe, in recognition of his outstanding personal heroism, inspired leadership and great gallantry while serving as a member of the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam.

I offer on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, my colleagues and myself our warmest commendation of this supreme honour bestowed by Her Majesty.

I would like to pay my own personal tribute to your late husband's magnificent courage, valour and devotion to duty. He will be a source of inspiration to all Australians.

Yours sincerely,

(HAROLD HOLT)"

Mrs. D. M. Badcoe,
159 Wattle Street,
O'CONNOR. A.C.T. 2601

BACKGROUND

Major Badcoe was born in South Australia on 11th January, 1934, and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Australian Staff Corps in December, 1952. He was allotted to the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery and after a number of Regimental and Staff postings transferred to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. He joined the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam in August, 1966, and was posted as Sector Operations Officer in Thua Thien Province, South Vietnam.

Major Badcoe's award is the 94th Victoria Cross awarded to an Australian and the second since World War II.

The last award was made on 15th December, 1966, to the late warrant Officer Kevin Arthur Wheatley for action in Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnam on 13th November, 1965.
CANBERRA = 16th October, 1967