



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Main Committee

**CORPORAL BENJAMIN
ROBERTS-SMITH VC, MG**

SPEECH

Thursday, 10 February 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Thursday, 10 February 2011 Page 89 Questioner Speaker Robert, Stuart, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
---	---

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (12.01 pm)—On indulgence: I rise to lend some comment to the awarding of the Victoria Cross to Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC, MG, a soldier standing over 200 centimetres tall, half Spartan, half Athenian. He is Spartan in raw courage and incredible valour in concern for his mates; in strength; in commitment; and in dedication. He is Athenian in his love for his family, his wife and two beautiful daughters; in his recognition and care for nature; and in his kind and gentle words to all he speaks to. He is a modern day warrior, perhaps a modern day poet, and truly a great Australian soldier.

Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC was awarded the nation's highest honour, the Victoria Cross, on 23 January 2011. The Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, awarded the medal at an investiture ceremony at Campbell Barracks, the home of the Special Air Service Regiment in Perth. He probably now is one of the most highly decorated soldiers in the nation, wearing both the Victoria Cross and the Medal for Gallantry, which was awarded for bravery in Afghanistan in 2006. At the investiture ceremony, a wonderful picture was painted as the Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Houston, made the point that Corporal Roberts-Smith had brought credit not only to himself and to the uniform he wears but to his nation. He spoke of the enduring sacrifice of soldiers and of the Special Air Service Regiment as one of the finest fighting forces in the world, and he spoke highly of our newest VC recipient—indeed high praise from Caesar himself!

The true impact of the Victoria Cross, however, is perhaps demonstrated more fully by the fact that CDF then stood and saluted Corporal Roberts-Smith, something that he has the honour to do and something that all serving military personnel will do when they meet Corporal Roberts-Smith VC. The awarding of the medal is also significant in terms of what it has brought to our nation and its people. The military has once again presented its heroes that the nation can look to, aspire to, acknowledge and seek to emulate, not so much in deed but definitely in thought and, more importantly, in character. His valour and his courage lie at the nation's very core.

Corporal Roberts-Smith exemplifies the best of us in that he won this amazing medal not so much for destroying enemy combatants in war but more for the reason for which he did those deeds: he sought out and closed with the enemy because his mates were at enormous risk. When asked why he ran 20 metres into withering machinegun blasts, he answered that it was because one of his mates was taking enormous fire and he thought he would just have a crack. Truly Australian.

It should come as no surprise that Corporal Roberts-Smith, born and bred of the very essence of that which defines us all, put his life on the line for his mates. His concern was always for his fellow soldiers, and that concern overrode the very basic instinct of survival, the very basic instinct of self-preservation, and he overcame that while fearing fear itself and took himself to those great lengths—charging a machinegun post, despatching enemy gunners and then continuing to fight for the following hours.

Some would argue this is the stuff of fiction; how writers would eloquently write about how romantic war could be. This is indeed the stuff of legend, carved out of the harshness of an Afghani landscape, where bravery and fear are very real, where shed blood is the result of actions. That is why the Australian Defence Force in all its elements, not just the Special Operations Task Group but the men and women of our Mentoring Task Force, is held in such high regard. We ask no quarter, we give no quarter, and certainly Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC emulated that to the extreme.

I recently stood in the House and spoke on a condolence motion for Corporal Richard Atkinson. I am aware that I am following on from the conclusion of that condolence motion. Many members stood to express their great sympathy and to acknowledge the sacrifice of Corporal Atkinson, the twenty-second Australian to lay down his life in action in the combat operational zone in Afghanistan. I also take this opportunity to personally thank all members for their gracious words of support to the family and friends of Corporal Atkinson. Thank you for taking the time to acknowledge his sacrifice. It is important. In time his fiancée, Dannielle, his mum and dad and his brother and his brother's wife and his future nieces and nephews will read the words of members of this

parliament, and they will see how the nation stood to honour him. Amongst all the sadness, amongst the difficult times, words expressed by the nation's leaders make a difference. Words are indeed powerful.

It is fabulous that here in this place, in the nation's capital, we are able to express both great admiration for the works of our national heroes and great gratitude for their truly selfless acts of bravery. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. We see this not only in Corporal Richard Atkinson but, importantly, in Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC, who sought to go forward to protect his mates regardless of the personal sacrifice. It is a tribute to him and all who follow him.