



SUPPLEMENT TO

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THURSDAY, 15TH DECEMBER 1966

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased on the advice of Her Majesty's Australian Ministers to approve the Posthumous award of the VICTORIA CROSS to:

29890 Warrant Officer Class II Kevin Arthur WHEATLEY, Australian Army Training Team.

Warrant Officer Wheatley enlisted in the Australian Regular Army in 1956. He served in Malaya with 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment from 1957 to 1959 and then with the 2nd and 1st Battalions of the Regiment until February 1965 when he was posted to the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam.

His posting in this area has been distinguished by meritorious and gallant service.

On 13th November 1965 at approximately 1300 hours, a Vietnamese Civil Irregular Defence Group company commenced a search and destroy operation in the Tra Bong valley, 15 kilometres East of Tra Bong Special Forces Camp in Quang Ngai Province. Accompanying the force were Captain F. Fazekas, senior Australian Advisor, with the centre platoon, and Warrant Officers K. A. Wheatley and R. J. Swanton with the right hand platoon. At about 1340 hours, Warrant Officer Wheatley reported contact with Viet Cong elements. The Viet Cong resistance increased in strength until finally Warrant Officer Wheatley asked for assistance. Captain Fazekas immediately organised the centre platoon to help and personally led and fought it towards the action area. While moving towards this area he received another radio message from Warrant Officer Wheatley to say that Warrant Officer Swanton had been hit in the chest, and requested an air strike and an aircraft, for the evacuation of casualties.

At about this time the right platoon broke in the face of heavy Viet Cong fire and began to scatter. Although told by the Civil Irregular Defence Group medical assistant that Warrant Officer Swanton was dying, Warrant Officer Wheatley refused to abandon him. He discarded his radio to enable him to half drag, half carry Warrant Officer Swanton, under heavy machine gun and automatic rifle fire, out of the open rice paddies into the comparative safety of a wooded area, some 200 metres away. He was assisted by a Civil Irregular Defence Group member, Private Dinh Do who, when the Viet Cong were only some ten metres away, urged him to leave his dying comrade. Again he refused, and was seen to pull the pins from two grenades and calmly awaited the Viet Cong, holding one grenade in each hand. Shortly afterwards, two grenade explosions were heard, followed by several bursts of fire.

The two bodies were found at first light next morning after the fighting had ceased, with Warrant Officer Wheatley lying beside Warrant Officer Swanton. Both had died of gunshot wounds.

Warrant Officer Wheatley displayed magnificent courage in the face of an overwhelming Viet Cong force which was later estimated at more than a company. He had the clear choice of abandoning a wounded comrade and saving himself by escaping through the dense timber or of staying with Warrant Officer Swanton and thereby facing certain death. He deliberately chose the latter course. His acts of heroism, determination and unflinching loyalty in the face of the enemy will always stand as examples of the true meaning of valour.

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