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Honours and Awards

CENTRAL CHANCERY OF THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD

St James's Palace, London SW1

24th July 2008

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the George Cross to the under-mentioned:

ROYAL NAVY

George Cross

P903233G Lance Corporal Matthew CROUCHER, Royal Marines Reserve.

Throughout December 2007 and January 2008, Forward Operating Base ROBINSON, an International Security Assistance Force/Afghanistan National Army location situated 10 km to the south of Sangin, had been targeted relentlessly by an enemy seeking to inflict death and grievous injury on Coalition Forces. Complex and highly effective improvised explosive devices had been deployed by the Taliban throughout the Forward Operating Base's area of responsibility with deadly success. Movement around the Forward Operating Base location was fraught with danger and exceptionally high risk for troops, whether vehicle borne or operating on foot. Tasked with conducting both overt and covert patrolling to disrupt and interdict enemy forces, 40 Commando Battle Group was determined to regain the initiative.

Lance Corporal Croucher was deployed to Helmand Province, Afghanistan as a reconnaissance operator in 40 Commando Group's Commando Reconnaissance Force, elements of which were operating from Forward Operating Base ROBINSON.

On 9 February 2008, the Commando Reconnaissance Force was tasked to conduct reconnaissance of a compound in which it was suspected that Taliban fighters manufactured Improvised Explosive Devices. Lance Corporal Croucher's section was deployed on this highly dangerous and challenging operation. In the early hours, utilising night vision devices and under constant threat of attack from Improved Explosive Devices or enemy ambush, the Commando Reconnaissance Force successfully negotiated the complex and varied terrain between the Forward Operating Base and the suspect compound, and established an over-watch position to observe for any sign of activity.

In order to determine conclusively that the compound was an Improvised Explosive Device manufacturing site, the decision was made to send a small four man team, which included Lance Corporal Croucher, forward to conduct a very high risk "close target reconnaissance". This required the team to enter the compound. It was believed to be occupied. The team moved forward with extreme caution and stealth and successfully gained entry into the compound without incident. After 30 minutes on task, and having identified numerous items that could be used by insurgents to manufacture Improvised Explosive Devices, the team commander gave the order for the team to extract back to their pre-arranged rendezvous point with the remainder of Commando Reconnaissance Force.

Lance Corporal Croucher was at the head of the group as they commenced the extraction; behind him, approximately 5 metres away, the Team Commander and another Marine were in the open and fully exposed, with the fourth team member a short distance behind them. As the team moved silently through the still darkened compound, Lance Corporal Croucher felt a wire go tight against his legs, just below knee height. This was a trip-wire connected to a grenade booby-trap, positioned to kill