

or maim intruders in the compound. He heard the fly-off lever eject and the grenade, now armed, fell onto the ground immediately beside him.

Instantly realising what had occurred, Lance Corporal Croucher made a crucial and incredibly rapid assessment of the situation. With extraordinary clarity of thought and remarkable composure, he shouted "Grenade", then "Tripwire" in an attempt to warn his comrades to find cover before the grenade exploded. It was clear to him that given the lack of cover in the immediate vicinity, he and the other team members were in extreme danger.

Due to low light levels, he was unable to determine the type of grenade and therefore had no way of knowing how long the device's fuse would take to function. With his comrades totally exposed and time running out, Lance Corporal Croucher made the decision not to seek cover or protection for himself, but to attempt to shield the other members of his team from the impending explosion. In an act of great courage, and demonstrating a complete disregard for his own safety, he threw himself on top of the grenade, pinning it between his day sack, containing his essential team stores, and the ground. Quite prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for his fellow Marines, Lance Corporal Croucher lay on the grenade and braced himself for the explosion. Meanwhile, the Team Commander, upon hearing the initial shouted warning, dived to the ground. The rear man in the team was able to take cover by stepping back around the corner of a building; the other team member was unable to react quickly enough and was still upright, fully exposed within the lethal range of the grenade.

As it detonated, the blast effect of the grenade was absorbed by Lance Corporal Croucher and the majority of the fragmentation was contained under his body. Miraculously, his equipment and protective clothing prevented any lethal shards hitting his body and he suffered only minor injury and disorientation from the effects of the blast. Lance Corporal Croucher's day sack was ripped from his back and was completely destroyed; his body armour and helmet were pitted by grenade fragments. A large battery being carried in the side pouch of his day sack, for his team's Electronic Counter Measures equipment, also exploded and was burning like a flare as a result of the grenade fragments breaching the outer case. Incredibly, the only other injury was a slight fragmentation wound to the Team Commander's face.

The others escaped unscathed. Without question, Lance Corporal Croucher's courageous and utterly selfless action had prevented death or serious injury to at least two members of his team. Immediately following the explosion they manoeuvred tactically back to their rendezvous location. After confirming with the Troop Commander that no significant casualties had been sustained, the decision was made to interdict enemy forces attempting to conduct a follow-up to the incident. As anticipated, enemy activity was observed by Commando Reconnaissance Force and Lance Corporal Croucher, having refused to be evacuated, along with other members of his team, engaged and neutralized one enemy fighter.

Throughout his service in Afghanistan, Lance Corporal Croucher has served with the utmost distinction. His actions on 9 February 2008, when he willingly risked his own life in a most deliberate act of self-sacrifice to save his comrades from death or serious injury, were wholly typical of the man. During a previous engagement at Forward Operating Base Inkerman on 9 November 2007, Lance Corporal Croucher helped save the life of a fallen comrade who had received a serious gunshot wound to the chest during a ferocious fire-fight with the enemy. For twenty minutes, whilst the company medical assistant was pinned down by enemy fire, he applied life-saving first aid which stabilised the wounded man until medical assistance arrived and the casualty could be extracted. Meanwhile, on 16 November 2007, whilst providing intimate security to a night air drop in the desert near Forward Operating Base Inkerman, Lance Corporal Croucher was injured in a road traffic accident. Evacuated to the UK with a suspected broken leg, he was determined to return to theatre and, following intense physiotherapy, he returned within a matter of weeks to resume his duties with Commando Reconnaissance Force.

That he was willing to risk all in order to save the lives of his comrades is indisputable; that he possesses an indomitable fighting spirit is abundantly clear. Lance Corporal Croucher is an exceptional and inspirational individual. His magnificent displays of selflessness and gallantry are truly humbling and are the embodiment of the finest traditions of the Service.

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