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Honours and Awards

CENTRAL CHANCERY OF THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD

St James's Palace, London SW1

19 March 2010

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

ARMY

George Cross

GC

Staff Sergeant Kim Spencer HUGHES, The Royal Logistic Corps, 25053515.

On 16 August 2009, Staff Sergeant Hughes, a High Threat Improvised Explosive Device Disposal (IEDD) operator, along with a Royal Engineers Search Team (REST), was tasked to provide close support to the 2 Rifles Battlegroup during an operation to clear a route, south west of Sangin.

In preparation for the operation, elements of A Company deployed early to secure an Emergency Helicopter Landing Site and isolate compounds to the south of the route as part of the inner cordon. Whilst conducting these preliminary moves the point section initiated a Victim Operated IED (VOIED) resulting in a very serious casualty. During the casualty recovery that followed, the stretcher-bearers initiated a second VOIED that resulted in 2 personnel being killed outright and 4 other very serious casualties, one of whom later died from his wounds. The area was effectively an IED minefield, over-watched by the enemy and the section were stranded within it. Hughes and his team were called into this harrowing and chaotic situation to extract the casualties and recover the bodies. Speed was absolutely essential if further lives were not to be lost.

Without specialist protective clothing in order to save time, Hughes set about clearing a path to the injured, providing constant reassurance that help was on its way. On reaching the first badly injured soldier he discovered a further VOIED within one metre of the casualty that, given their proximity, constituted a grave and immediate threat to the lives of all the casualties. Without knowing the location of the power source, but acutely attuned to the lethal danger he was facing and the overriding need to get medical attention to the casualties rapidly, Hughes calmly carried out a manual neutralisation of the device; any error would have proved instantly fatal. This was a 'Category A' action only conducted in one of 2 circumstances; a hostage scenario where explosives have been strapped to an innocent individual and a mass casualty event where not taking action is certain to result in further casualties. Both place the emphasis on saving other peoples' lives even, if necessary, at the expense of the operator. It was an extraordinary act. With shots keeping the enemy at bay, Hughes coolly turned his attention to reaching the remaining casualties and retrieving the dead. Clearing a path forward he discovered 2 further VOIEDs and, twice more, carried out manual neutralisation. His utterly selfless action enabled all the casualties to be extracted and the bodies recovered. Even at this stage Hughes' task was not finished. The Royal Engineers Search Team (REST) had detected a further 4 VOIEDs in the immediate area and stoically, like he has on over 80 other occasions in the last 5 months, he set about disposing of them too.

Dealing with any form of IED is dangerous; to deal with 7 VOIEDs linked in a single circuit, in a mass casualty scenario, using manual neutralisation techniques once, never mind 3 times, is the single most outstanding act of explosive ordnance disposal ever recorded in Afghanistan. That he did it without the security of specialist protective clothing serves even more to

demonstrate his outstanding gallantry. Hughes is unequivocally deserving of the highest level of public recognition.

Staff Sergeant Olaf Sean George SCHMID, The Royal Logistic Corps, 25045811 (killed in action).

Staff Sergeant Schmid was a High Threat Improvised Explosive Device Disposal (IEDD) Operator in Helmand from June 2009 until his death in action on 31 October 2009. He deployed at the height of Operation PANTHER'S CLAW and went immediately into the fray, into one of the most physically draining, mentally intense and hazardous jobs in Helmand. Typically having to deploy on foot, thereby precluding the option of specialist protective equipment and severely limiting the use of remote controlled vehicles, he spent long periods of time in close proximity to Victim Operated IEDs (VOIED) and in the gravest personal danger. Before his death in action he responded to 42 IED tasks, personally dealing with 70 confirmed IEDs. A number of examples illustrate his bravery.

An infantry company based in Wishtan province was isolated by a substantial minefield and the infamous Pharmacy Road, the only resupply route, was blocked by a medium wheeled tractor and another vehicle, both blown up by very large IEDs. Intelligence, unenviable first-hand experience and numerous unexplained explosions from the area indicated that the area of the stricken vehicles was laced with IEDs. At 0800 hrs on 9 August 2009, as temperatures soared past 45°C, Schmid started work. Within only a hundred metres he found and cleared an IED and once within 100 metres of the vehicles, intent on using a remote controlled vehicle (RCV) and remote explosive clearance devices, he deployed an RCV that struck an IED and was destroyed. Schmid moved forward without hesitation and, well inside the most lethal arc of any device, manually placed explosive charges, clearing a route to within 5 metres of the vehicles. His team then moved to clear a compound adjacent to the stricken vehicles to drag them off the road. When a second IED was found, Schmid made another manual approach and rapidly got rid of it. A new approach to the vehicles from the compound was explosively created for the hulks to be dragged clear. Schmid painstakingly cleared up to both vehicles and his first trip took an hour. He was relying on his eyesight and his understanding of enemy tactics alone. Despite the threat, Schmid again decided against explosive clearance; time was critical so he placed heavy and cumbersome chains onto the stricken vehicles, the riskiest of enterprises given the very high likelihood of booby traps, and the vehicles were finally dragged clear. As light started to fade, Schmid then personally led a high

risk clearance of the road where the vehicles had been, manually disposing of two further IEDs. The clearance had lasted 11 hours. It was physically, mentally and emotionally draining, but the road was open and the company resupplied. The resounding success of this battlegroup operation was entirely due to the heroic, selfless acts of Schmid.

On 8 October 2009 Schmid was tasked in Sangin District Centre to deal with an artillery shell reported by unmentored Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers. On arrival the ANA led him, unsuspecting, directly to the device. He was now not only at grave personal risk but immediately realised that the many unsuspecting civilians around him in the bustling bazaar were also in peril. Time was not on his side. He quickly assessed that the shell was in fact part of a live Radio Controlled IED intended to cause maximum casualties in a well populated area. The nature of the device also meant it was almost certainly over-watched by the bomber controlling it. Without any consideration for his own safety, Schmid immediately decided to neutralise the IED manually. To do this he knew he was employing a render safe procedure that should only ever be employed in the gravest of circumstances and which is conducted at the highest personal risk to the operator. In an instant, Schmid made the most courageous decision possible, consciously placing his own life on the line in order to save the lives of countless Afghan civilians and demonstrating bravery of the highest order and well beyond the call of duty.

At the end of October 2009 Schmid was involved in an operation near Forward Operating Base JACKSON in Battle Group North's area. Having dealt with three IEDs already that day, Schmid and his team were transiting to another compound when a searcher discovered a command wire running down the alleyway they were using. Schmid and his team were trapped in the alleyway with no safe route forward or back as they did not know in which direction the IED was situated. Knowing that his team were in potential danger, he immediately took action to reduce the hazard. Schmid eventually traced the wire to a complex command wire IED in that it incorporated three linked buried main charges. He was killed whilst dealing with the device. Schmid's actions on that fateful day, when trapped in an alleyway with no safe means of escape, probably saved the lives of his team.

These occasions are representative of the complexity and danger that Schmid had faced daily throughout his four month tour. His selfless gallantry, his devotion to duty, and his indefatigable courage displayed time and time again saved countless military and civilian lives and is worthy of the highest recognition.

