

Speech

Address By

**His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia**

On the occasion of

Presentation of the Unit Citation for Gallantry to 4RAR (Commando)

Holsworthy Army Barracks, NSW
26 October 2007

It gives me great pleasure to be here today, as Commander-in-Chief and a former Special Forces soldier, to present the Battalion with a Unit Citation for Gallantry for service with the Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan.

May I commend the smartly turned-out guard, whose demeanour and bearing was of a high standard. Well done.

I also wish to acknowledge the return of Alpha Commando Company Group from their successful deployment to Afghanistan. Another job well done.

Very recently, I travelled to Polygon Wood in Belgium to participate in the ceremony to reinter five Australian soldiers of the First World War.

Whilst in Belgium, I had the opportunity to receive a briefing from the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe, NATO, with respect to Coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. It should come as no surprise that the Australian contribution is very highly regarded indeed.

It is fitting therefore that this service has now been recognised with the award of the Unit Citation for Gallantry — an achievement reserved for troops who display extraordinary and sustained bravery in action.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us examine briefly the characteristics of those receiving this award.

Personal traits must include high intelligence, initiative to a marked degree, physical and moral courage, superb fitness, personal and group discipline, composure under pressure, and an unceasing desire to find more effective and efficient ways of carrying out diverse tasks in a wide variety of operational situations, conducted at times at very short notice.

I have said many times that the soldier personifies the “special” in Special Forces.

And these finely honed characteristics of the individual soldier are what Special Forces, and indeed this Battalion, is all about.

4 RAR (Cdo) continues to represent Australia’s only full-time commando capability. It spans the operational divide between the conventional and unconventional, focusing usually on Advance Force Operations and specialising in offshore strike activities.

The unit maintains primacy for domestic Special Recovery Operations in the counter terrorist environment with its highly trained Tactical Assault Group (East), and is the only ADF unit capable of conducting company-sized specialist advanced parachute techniques.

Of course, a battalion doesn’t simply become ‘special’, in much the same way as soldiers don’t simply become commandos.

Like every military unit or formation, training under innovative leadership is the key to success and it must be realistic, structured and achievable. It must focus the individual and the team on the collective task at hand, and above all, it must be

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done as safely as possible, albeit with an acceptance of risk.

Bring this all together successfully, and we have the makings of a formidable unit.

As indeed in the case of this battalion, 4RAR (Cdo), a team that performed superbly in twelve months of intense operational service in the ongoing campaign against Anti Coalition Militia in Afghanistan.

Let me read the citation:

“For acts of extraordinary gallantry in action in Afghanistan, from 25 August 2005 to 2 September 2006, in support of security and stabilisation operations in Afghanistan and the International Coalition against Terrorism.

During the course of the operation, the Task Group fought a series of precarious battles and skirmishes against a resourceful enemy.

The Task Group was also able to successfully neutralise the enemy on a number occasions in previously impenetrable sanctuary areas.

With clear, strategic combat duties, the Task Group quickly stamped their authority in the combat region despite being in the heartland of the Taliban and Anti Coalition Militia.

During the 374 day deployment, the combat element spent 309 days in the field undertaking over 100 missions resulting in 139 combat engagements with the enemy ranging from small skirmishes to full scale battles.”

Ladies and gentlemen, think about it: 139 combat engagements in 309 days; an incredible operational tempo by any standards.

It is noteworthy that the operational conditions in which this deployment took place are recognised as being some of the most difficult in which Australians have ever deployed.

These conditions included huge mountains, ice, snow and desert hampering movement of troops and effective logistical support; scarcity of fresh water; and a battle hardened enemy, with superb local knowledge and an incredible toughness developed over many campaigns, fighting in earlier times against the British, the Russians and when there was no common external enemy, often fighting amongst themselves. So they know the sharp end of the business and they know the country.

In these conditions, the operations of 4RAR (Cdo) along with its sister unit the Special Air Service Regiment — were innovative, courageous and successful.

The Battalion operated amid high levels of threat at an extremely demanding operational tempo throughout the twelve month commitment, displaying magnificent cohesion and professionalism.

Key to its battlefield success was the support efforts of the logistics staff who worked tirelessly to repair the vehicles that were towed or extracted by air from the field, in conducting numerous field and aerial resupplies of water, rations, fuel and ammunition, and in establishing and maintaining communications to ensure the combat elements were fully supported at all times.

And also the medics who provided such splendid primary medical care to the wounded, at times under heavy fire. The medics also worked alongside Coalition medical personnel to provide the very best care for our people.

This magnificent example of exemplary service brings great credit on the men and women of 4 RAR (Cdo), the Australian Army and the nation as a whole.

And so it gives me great pleasure to now formally invest the 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) with the Unit Citation for Gallantry.

Well done to you all.