

DOUBLE TRAGEDY

PICTURES BY NZDF

In recent months, the New Zealand Defence Force has suffered the loss of two of its finest warriors – two members of their Special Air Service – NZSAS.

Both were killed in action in Afghanistan and have been added to the NZSAS Roll of Honour as only the third and fourth members of that elite unit to be recorded as Killed in Action – the first being in Malaya in 1956 and the second in Vietnam in 1970.



CORPORAL DOUG GRANT

Corporal Doug Grant was killed during an exchange of gunfire in Kabul on Friday 19 August 2011 while responding to an attack by insurgents on the offices of the British Council.

Although he was wearing body armour, a bullet, probably 7.62mm, was reported by Chief of Defence Force Lieutenant General Rhys Jones to have struck the soldier in the side, below the armpit, traversing through his chest cavity, through his heart and out the other side.

While it is thought Corporal Grant still had a pulse when he was evacuated from the scene, his wounds were clearly not survivable and he was pronounced dead before reaching hospital.

Lieutenant General Jones said the work of the SAS was always dangerous, but they were brave men who trained to do all they could to serve New Zealand.

"The events of Friday in Kabul reinforce to us all that ours is a dangerous profession and, while we accept these risks, the death of a

colleague, friend and father is always difficult to take," Lieutenant General Jones said.

"Our thoughts are with his family, members of his unit and friends and colleagues within the NZ Army and NZ Defence Force as a whole."

Corporal Grant was a highly regarded member of his unit who had a long and successful career with the New Zealand Defence Force.

He had served in the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, Royal New Zealand Engineers and the NZSAS.

He was 41 years old and had served twice in East Timor, once in the former Yugoslavia and was on his second tour in Afghanistan. He was married with a 7-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son.

In a statement released by Defence on behalf of Corporal Grant's family they said Doug had a wide group of friends from all walks of life and the support and love they received from all of those people had been humbling.

"Some might wonder why Doug went into harm's way. Doug had absolute faith in his friends and colleagues, and what he was doing in Afghanistan. He understood what he was getting into and believed in the goal of training local forces for that country's future."

"He was a determined person – some may say stubborn – in his pursuit of his goals while growing up. He wrote in a school essay once that he wanted to be in the SAS and he worked towards that goal from that time onwards and convinced the Army he could do the job."

"Like most Kiwis, Doug did not make a big deal about his achievements. He shied away from the spotlight, preferring to focus his attentions on his family and getting whatever job he tackled done to the best of his considerable abilities, whether it was building a house, being a soldier or being a husband and father."



"The family is incredibly proud of Doug's achievements as a soldier and as a husband, father, brother, and son."

Corporal Grant returned to New Zealand on 24 August and was buried with full military honours on 29 August in Linton Military Camp.



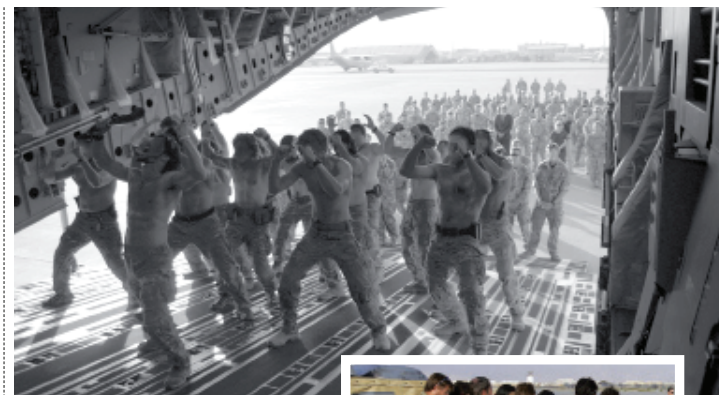
LANCE CORPORAL LEON SMITH

On 28 September, Chief of Defence Force Lieutenant General Rhys Jones had the unenviable task of announcing to a New Zealand family and the nation that a second NZSAS soldier had been killed in action in Afghanistan.

"Once again we are facing the death of one of our brave men in a country far away. My thoughts and indeed the thoughts of all New Zealanders are with this trooper's family as they face the loss of their loved one," Lieutenant General Jones said.

"The SAS mission in Afghanistan was always going to involve high risk as they actively work with the Kabul-based Crisis Response Unit (CRU) to try and confront the insurgent threat in the country."

On this occasion, in the early hours of the morning, on 28 September, as the group moved to a compound of concern, it was engaged by suspected insurgents and Lance



Corporal Leon Smith was struck in the head by a bullet, gravely wounding him.

Despite best efforts, he was later declared dead in hospital.

Lance Corporal Smith was 33 years old and grew up in Wellington before moving to Auckland with his work.

He enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Navy in 1997 but transferred to the Territorial Force 2005 as a rifleman and eventually qualified on the NZSAS selection course in 2006.

Following the successful completion of the NZSAS cycle of training courses, Lance Corporal Smith was accepted and Badged into the NZSAS on 8 September 2008.

He was promoted to the substantive rank of lance corporal in January this year.

Lance Corporal Smith, although junior, was an operationally experienced NZSAS trooper having first served in Afghanistan in 2010. He had spent almost 11 out of the past 24 months on operations.

Lance Corporal Smith was employed as an Advanced Medic and was the first medic to treat Corporal Doug Grant when he was wounded during the attack on the British Council compound in Kabul.

Lance Corporal Smith was single with no children and resided in Auckland. He leaves behind his mother, grandmother and two brothers in Wellington and his father and grandparents in Tauranga.

In a statement, his family said Leon was loved by his family. He was also loved by his friends and his comrades. He was a wonderful grandson, son, brother and a friend to many. He was sincere and genuine.

"Leon was proud to serve in the NZSAS. He believed in what he was doing, and we supported him in what he did."

"We are grieving the loss of Leon. We ask for our privacy to be respected at this very difficult time."

"Rest in peace, Leon."

Lance Corporal Leon Smith was laid to rest at Papakura Military Camp on 6 October.

