The Victoria Cross

"For Valour"

The Victoria Cross was awarded to South Australian soldier Major Peter Badcoe in recognition of his courage under fire on three separate occasions during the Vietnam War.

Major Peter Badcoe VC

Peter Badcoe was born in Malvern, South Australia, on 11 January 1934.

Although his father opposed it, Peter, a former Adelaide Technical High School student, always wanted to join the army.

He graduated from the Officer Cadet School, Portsea in 1952 and like thousands of other Australians, served in the Vietnam War.

On 23 February 1967 in Phu Thu District, Major Badcoe, while under heavy fire, rescued a United States Medical Adviser.

On 7 March, he led his company in an attack and turned what seemed to be certain defeat into victory.

A month later, while leading his company against a superior enemy force, he was hit and killed by machine-gun fire after rising to throw a grenade.

Major Badcoe's courage and leadership on all these occasions was remarkable. Each action was successful despite the final one ending in his death.

The Cross

Following his death, Major Badcoe was awarded the Victoria Cross.

The Victoria Cross is the highest award for acts of bravery in wartime to be given to a British or Commonwealth serviceperson. It was designed to recognise bravery, regardless of rank, wealth or social status.

Instituted in 1856 by Queen Victoria, the Victoria Cross comprises a cross with the Royal Crown at its centre. The Crown is surmounted by a crowned lion. It is inscribed "For Valour".

The date of the act of bravery is inscribed on the back of each Victoria Cross.

Major P J Badcoe, Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam.
Photographer unkown. Australian War Memorial: negative 116857

The Medals of Major Peter Badcoe VC. L-R: Victoria Cross, Vietnam Medal, US Silver Star, South Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star, South Vietnamese Government Campaign Medal. *Photographer Crispin Savage*

Traditionally, the bronze from which all Victoria Crosses are made is taken from enemy cannons, captured at Sevastopol during the Crimean War - a battle between the Russian Empire and a group of European allies between 1854 and 1856.

The bronze is supplied from the Central Ordance Depot in Donnington in the United Kingdom. The crosses are hand-fashioned exclusively by London jewellers, Hancocks & Co.

To date, 1356 Victoria Crosses have been awarded. Of those 96 have been to Australians.

Lest We Forget

In addition to receiving the Victoria Cross, Major Badcoe was acknowledged by the Australian, American and South Vietnamese Governments for his bravery.

He is also commemorated in South Australia by the RSL's Badcoe Medal, which is awarded annually to the most deserving player in the ANZAC Round AFL match in Adelaide.

A Hero Forever in Australian History

The Victoria Cross – along with a collection of medals and memorabilia including letters, photographs and recordings that Major Badcoe sent to his family – was auctioned in Sydney on 20 May 2008.

There were concerns the Victoria Cross could be sold to an overseas bidder and lost to Australia.

However, the South Australian Government and Australian businessman and philanthropist Kerry Stokes combined to buy the Cross - ensuring it remained part of our nation's heritage.

Major Badcoe's Victoria Cross, medals and memorabilia sold for $488 000.

Reverse of Major Badcoe's Victoria Cross.
Photographer Crispin Savage