

A posthumous Victoria Cross is to be awarded to Lance Corporal James Ashworth of the Grenadier Guards. He was killed on 13th June 2012 while fighting in Nahr-e-Siraj. His actions saved his comrades' lives. A full obituary was published by Defence Viewpoints at the time and can be found in the In Memoriam section and at

[http://www.defenceviewpoints.co.uk/administrator/index.php?option=com_content§ionid=26&task=edit&cid\[\]=3839](http://www.defenceviewpoints.co.uk/administrator/index.php?option=com_content§ionid=26&task=edit&cid[]=3839)

The story of his heroism is on the next page.

Lance Corporal James Ashworth, 23 from Corby, Northamptonshire was killed as he stormed an insurgent position in the Nahr-e-Saraj district of Helmand in June 2012. His conduct in putting himself in the line of fire to protect his colleagues has been rewarded with the Victoria Cross (VC), the first award of the honour since 2006. LCpl Ashworth and his platoon from the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards were inserted into Nahr-e-Saraj on 13 June in order to engage an insurgent sharpshooter team. They came under fire as soon as they landed, prompting LCpl Ashworth to lead his fire team in a 300 metre charge to the heart of the enemy position in a local village. Two insurgents were killed in this initial attack, but a follow-up assault by Afghan Police stalled when a patrolman was shot and killed as the enemy fled.

With no regard for his own safety, LCpl Ashworth again led from the front of his team, advancing on an insurgent compound and using grenades to drive the final remaining enemy to an outbuilding. The insurgent was now being supported by fire from several positions, with the enemy desperate to protect their sharpshooter team. The immediate priority for LCpl Ashworth's team was now to neutralise the final sharpshooter and extract as soon as possible. Seeking to break the stalemate using his final grenade, LCpl Ashworth dropped to the floor and crawled behind a

knee-high wall that ran parallel to the front of the outbuilding. With just enough cover to conceal his prostrate form, he inched forward on his belly. Bullets flew over his head as he edged forward and the enemy continued to engage the rest of his team. When he was within five metres of the insurgent's position LCpl Ashworth was desperate to make his last grenade count. He deliberately crawled out from behind the wall, exposing himself to fire to get a better angle for his throw. LCpl Ashworth was now in full view of the enemy just metres away, with rounds hitting the floor just centimetres around him. He was preparing to throw the grenade when he was tragically hit by enemy fire.

The citation for LCpl Ashworth's VC underlines the exceptional bravery he showed:

"Despite the ferocity of the insurgent's resistance, Ashworth refused to be beaten. His total disregard for his own safety in ensuring that the last grenade was posted accurately was the gallant last action of a soldier who had willingly placed himself in the line of fire on numerous occasions earlier in the attack. This supremely courageous and inspiring action deserves the highest recognition."

The Victoria Cross is the most prestigious of all military decorations and only awarded in exceptional circumstances for bravery carried out under direct enemy fire. It was created in 29 January 1856 and is hand-made from bronze cannon captured from the Russians at the siege of Sevastopol in 1854-55 during the Crimean War. The inscription 'For Valour' was personally chosen by Queen Victoria.

To date, only 1,360 VC's have been awarded. LCpl Ashworth's is the 1,361st and is the first VC to be awarded to a British soldier since Corporal Bryan Budd was posthumously honoured in 2006.