Lance Corporal Joshua Leakey, 27, of the Parachute Regiment, who has been awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award for gallantry in the presence of the enemy. He is only the 15th winner since World War II.

On the 22 August 2013, Lance Corporal Leakey, deployed on a combined UK/US assault led by the United States Marine Corp into a Taliban stronghold to disrupt a key insurgent group.

On leaving their helicopters, the force came under machine gun and rocket propelled grenade fire, pinning down the command group on the exposed forward slope of a hill. For an hour the team attempted to extract from the killing zone; a Marine Corp Captain was shot and wounded and their communications were put out of action.

Lance Corporal Leakey said: "When you hear there's a man down, the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. Clearly then your plans change."

Realising the seriousness of the situation - and with complete disregard for his own safety he dashed across a large area of barren hillside being raked with machine gun fire. As he crested the hill, the full severity of the situation became apparent: approximately twenty enemy had surrounded two friendly machine gun teams and a mortar section, rendering their critical fire support ineffective.

Under fire yet undeterred by the very clear and present danger, Lance Corporal Leakey ran across the exposed slope of the hill three times to initiate casualty evacuation, re-site machine guns and return fire. His actions proved the turning point, inspiring his comrades to fight back with renewed ferocity. Displaying gritty leadership well above that expected of his rank, Lance Corporal Leakey's actions singlehandedly regained the initiative and prevented considerable loss of life.

Lance Corporal Leakey said: "It's massively humbling to put me alongside other people who have received this award. I'm conscious that there were other men on the ground that day who were doing their job just like everyone does. I see this as a massive honour for the Parachute Regiment as a whole. It is overwhelming. And I think it probably always will be."

After meeting him at Number 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister David Cameron said: "It is absolutely right that Lance Corporal Leakey has been awarded a Victoria Cross. He epitomised valour with his actions on that hillside in Helmand. When you hear how events unfolded and the intensity of enemy fire, it is difficult to imagine how one wouldn't be frozen to the spot and yet Lance Corporal Leakey risked his life to run across that barren hillside not just once, but multiple times, to turn the battle and save the lives of comrades. And that is why he deserves the highest honour for bravery the Nation can give."

Lieutenant General John Lorimer DSO MBE, Colonel Commandant of the Parachute Regiment said: "Lance Corporal Leakey's exemplary conduct in the face of heavy and accurate enemy fire typifies the spirit and ethos of the Parachute Regiment.

"On their behalf and as Colonel Commandant of the Parachute Regiment, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Lance Corporal Leakey on this singular and most deserved award. We are exceptionally proud of him."

The Commanding Officer of 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment said: "Lance Corporal Leakey's actions that day are in the finest traditions of the British Army. He is a deeply professional, quietly proud and very respected soldier whose courage and example espouses everything that is best in the Army's Values and Standards and those of the 1st Battalion, The Parachute Regiment. We are all immensely proud to serve alongside him."

Lance Corporal Leakey's parents, Mark and Rosie Leakey, said: "We are hugely proud of our son Josh and of the award he's going to receive. We celebrate the occasion today with Josh's mates, with his battalion and with the Parachute Regiment.

"As Josh's parents we are so thankful to God that he survived that day – along with many other occasions during his three operational tours in Afghanistan. Our hearts go out to so many other parents whose sons and daughters did not survive that long conflict. 'You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day...' (Psalm 91 v 5)."

Lance Corporal Leakey's brother, Ben Leakey, said: "I have always been incredibly proud of my

brother, for whom I have the utmost respect and admiration—regardless of the two letters that will now follow his name. In every sense, I have looked up to Josh for as long as I can remember, and will continue to do so far into the future as he returns to service life and his career as an airborne warrior in the Parachute Regiment."

Josh has always known that this was his path in life, but with being awarded the Victoria Cross he has well exceeded even his own expectations. It is an honour and a blessing to be able to enjoy this spectacular moment with him.