

FEDERAL COURT OF AUSTRALIA

NSD 1485, 1486, 1487 of 2018

Date: 24 June 2021

Ben Roberts-Smith v Fairfax Media Publications Pty Ltd & Ors

Exhibit No: R52
Assoc: Alice O'Connell

MFI No: _____

This document has been declassified to
OFFICIAL under Authority XC021 dated
26 May 2021 (O2753916).

MOUNTAIN THRUST CHORA CHORA

We left TK firebase on the 30th of May for Chora Valley to conduct Clandestine ops for follow on to take back Chora from the Taliban. Intelligence reporting has reported up to 700 Taliban in the area. My troop is broken down into three troops with 6 guys per troop except mine with seven. One of the priority task for this ops was to have eyes on certain TAI (Targets Areas of Interest) via Observation Post. The patrol that was tasked did not fill comfortable without having me attached so I had switched patrols for this tasking. The break down of our patrol was 1xBritish SBS(PC) 4xAUSS SAS 1x STS (ME) for the op. The plan would be I would do JTAC duties for our OP worse case scenario and the ground JTAC would control the battlefield from his position do to keeping minimal signature and silence and batteries and the time we would be occupying our OP. The plan was to move during the night up the hill through the hours of darkness and have our OP running by first light of the 1st of May. We departed the valley floor at 1730Z on the 31th via foot and arrived at our OP around 0100z on the 1st. Our OP was operational immediately do to our visibility on the Chora valley. First assessment of the valley was everybody was packing heat or was dug in behind fighting positions. There were at least 40 Taliban in the valley adjacent our OP. At around 0400z on the 31st the main body had started there move through the pass with apache support. With this in mind we witness multiple men and kids that were armed or were used to runs RPG's and ammo to the Taliban ages of kids 8-12 years old. During this time there was an UAV Tiger shark flying over the valley receiving shots fired multiple times. When the troop made there way in the valley the Taliban were definitely postured as if an attack was imminent. The apache was flying different tgt areas and could not PID anybody with weapons. During this time troop receive a harsh attack from 180 degrees from there position with rockets, small arms, RPG's, machine gun fire and Recoilless rifle fire witness from our op and possible sniper fire. This went on for about 10 minutes before I got up on AC-1 and asked Toombstone if anyone had initiated a troops in contact from any Dutch or Aussie element. He replied negative and at this time I said I need immediate air and told them that they were getting hit with everything to include the Recoilless rifle. Toombstone had pushed Dark24 1B-1 to me. The B-1 had checked on and I had began to drop immediately. My first bomb (GBU-31) was a known C-2 location passed by the predator it was a direct hit with an immediate seize fire. The next bomb GBU-31 was on the Recoilless rifle position it was also a direct hit and hadn't heard from that position the rest of our stay up there. The next bomb was going to be on Taliban massed up to 20 individuals I aborted the call do to the location of the apache and not having comms with that air frame. The next bomb was on a cemetery that had up to 12 Taliban at one time firing rockets and rpg's it was not a direct hit but it definitely had an impact and all firing had seized immediately from that position unknown BDA. It had allowed our ground element to maneuver back through the Chora pass. The rest of the day we had been gathering intel taking pictures and developing a target package for follow on op's. I controlled 2 sets of A-10's throughout the rest of the day as will with the AC-130 checking on later in the night. Do to the volume and stress and fall of Chora there was a huge push to conduct a massive hit on the night of the 2nd. The morning of the 2nd our troop on the ground had received ICOM hit in the same mountain ridge we were on about 800 meters East of our OP. The JTAC on the ground had controlled the A-10 which had

unknown BDA. During this time we had witnessed another 3 ACM move towards the mountain below our OP armed but we had lost them as soon as they got to the base of the mountain this was do to how steep this mountain was. This was approximately 0300Z on the morning of the 2nd of June. At about 0400z we had another ACM below our OP approximately 100 meters from us. Our sniper had taken the shot and he was killed instantly. At this time he had popped smoked to signal the others he had been killed as a signaling device. There was immediate fire up to that same area as soon as that smoke was visual to the Taliban in the valley floor. At this time I had received additional air support due to the spotter and level of risk of this op. I had the A-10's fly over the ridge line and to report back if they had anyone else moving south towards our position. I had stayed off of comms do to batteries I had and the amount of time we would be at our OP. The plan would be if they see anything they would pop a flare and if I needed them I would obviously come up immediately. Nothing was seen by them. I controlled 10x A-10's throughout the day and 1xB-1, 2GR-7's. At about 1400Z we had heard voices to the rear of our OP up to 3 Taliban. Our snipers had got into position again and proceeded to engage the enemy. The enemy had put effective small arms, machinegunfire back into our Op. It seemed as though they used keyholes and cover and just fired through them. We hit them with M-4, M-249 and 40mm to suppress them. At this time the village was alerted to the fire fight in the mountain and they had begun to form into multiple groups up to 16 individuals. At the same time we had seen another ACM on the West spur line so we had 2 individuals to our East 1 for sure to our south west and 16 to the North coming up the mountain. They had fired one RPG up to our OP and it came up short. At this time I had got up on AC-1 and requested air do to our OP being compromised Toombstone had relayed back to me that there was no air available. At this time I knew that if we didn't get air we would all be dead. I stayed persistent on AC-1 and told them that we would be over run shortly he told me to stand by he was working some air from another TIC. I then inquired about the Dutch apache's that were on 15 minute ground alert back at TK. Once again they said they were stripped down and it would take them 3 hours to get them up and running. With this our CC intent was to occupy the OP until H-HR at 1720Z for eyes on all of the TAI so pulling out wasn't an option yet. At around 1440Z a set of A-10's showed up and I began to drop just adjacent to our OP on the North face just below our position with rockets followed by multiple gun runs. I thought this tgt was the main threat do to the number of Taliban. Our sniper had picked one of the 16 off from our Op. That had helped buy us some time as will. The ACM split into two groups at the bottom of the mountain. The A-10 then released one Mk-82 AB over the group that was farther North at this time once again being highly effective stopping there movement. BDA from this group was one confirmed KIA. The other group was embedded into a rock feature about 300 meters South of the first group. I began talking the pilot on he had thought initially they were North of the other group but after a correction he knew they were South of the first group just a quick mix up maybe on my part. Tusk relayed that he had thought he had the tgt area in sight and I requested a gun run and to expect a correction off of his first hits. Tusk first hits were directly on TGT and #2 had came in as will and just destroyed the second group. Just to be safe lead came in with another gun run as you can never be to sure. At this time the tgt to our North the 16 ACM had either been neutralized or killed. I immediately focused there attention to the ridge line where we were. We had already put an IR strobe out but the pilots had not

transitioned to NVG's so they were configuring at this time it took about 7 minutes to get eyes on our location in the mountain. At this time our right flank was still a threat receiving fire with up to 2 ACM to our EAST within 100 meters or less. Advantages it was dark and we were on NVG's now THANK FUCKING GOD. As soon as TUSK confirmed our position I told him I wanted a gunrun 100 meters East of our position an he set up and came in on a gun run with # 2 right behind him. Tusk had just enough gas to do one more gun run before he had to RTB do to gas. And that's what he did lead and his wing did one more gun run before he left. The tgt's were definitely suppressed but what it did is buy us enough time to un fuck this ugly situation get eyes on the tgt area and hold the OP for H-HR. With the persistence and determination with the air situation and getting accurate rounds and bombs on the enemy during a high stress situation only one of the team members received a small piece of shrapnel embedded in his left breast pocket other than that a high case of adrenaline. At 2200Z the OP had collapsed and we married up with our main body on the valley floor to the South at 0030Z on 3 June. Overall mission success.

Person 23 STS (JTAC)

