

Colour Sergeant  
Alwyn John  
Stevens CGC



# HERO *of the* MONTH

By Lord Ashcroft



COLOUR SERGEANT STEVENS IS A PROFICIENT MARKSMAN – USEFUL IN AFGHANISTAN, WHERE ENGAGEMENT RANGES COULD BE BEYOND THE EFFECTIVE RANGE OF THE STANDARD-ISSUE RIFLE. ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF ALWYN STEVENS UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE.  
LEFT: MARSHALLING WARRIORS – IN 2008, THE ROYAL IRISH'S 1ST BATTALION HAD A MECHANISED ROLE, BUT SERVED WITH 16 AIR ASSAULT BRIGADE DURING HERRICK 8, FORMING OMLT TEAMS

*“Approaching the compound, Stevens had a sudden meeting engagement with eight Taliban who engaged with small arms. Instinctively, he charged, firing from the hip... he killed two, wounded another and forced the remainder to withdraw”*

I have two great passions in life that date back well over 60 years. The first is my overwhelming interest in bravery and the second is my fascination with the remote island of St Helena.

I was a toddler when I first visited the South Atlantic island as my family stopped off on our way to Africa, where my father was taking up a post as a colonial officer. I have had a soft spot for St Helena ever since and in recent years, until COVID intervened, became a regular visitor.

My interest in gallantry also stems from my father, Eric. He would tell me about his experiences of when he was a young officer charging up Sword Beach as part of the D-Day landings. I was about ten at the time, as he explained how his commanding officer had been shot dead at his side. My father himself was wounded by shrapnel, fighting on until ordered from the battlefield.

For the past 35 years, I have also been a collector of gallantry medals. With this in mind, I was delighted when I recently became the privileged custodian of a rare and much-treasured gallantry award – the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross – that was awarded to a ‘Saint’, as people from St Helena are widely known.

Colour Sergeant Alwyn Stevens was awarded the decoration – second only to the VC in terms of Commonwealth awards for bravery in the presence of the enemy – for his courage in Afghanistan. Today, with Stevens’ co-operation, I am

able to tell the full story of his unusual life and his outstanding valour.

Alwyn John Stevens was born at Longwood, St Helena, on October 16, 1978. St Helena is a remote, volcanic island and British Overseas Territory with a population of around 4,500. It was the place of exile for Napoleon Bonaparte after he was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo. He was taken to the island in October 1815 and died there on May 5, 1821, aged 51 – ironically at Longwood House, just a stone’s throw from where Stevens was born.

### Ambush ahead

The son of a lorry driver, Stevens also has a sister. He was educated locally and lived on the island until he enlisted in the army on October 18, 1999. Following basic training, he joined the Royal Irish Regiment. He was only a few weeks out of training when he was deployed to Sierra Leone. He later completed six tours of Northern Ireland, as well as tours of Iraq and Afghanistan, and qualified as a sniper in 2006.

Based largely at Fort George, Inverness, Stevens said of his role: “Being a sniper is not just all about shooting. There is a lot of other skills around the role.” Sometimes, he was one of just a two-man team that used to go out for 72 hours at a time on specific missions.

He was trained to use day and night optics and he used to carry both his sniper

rifle and a standard-issue rifle when on a mission. He said of the prospect of battle: “Everyone deals with it in their own way. The best way to deal with it is to talk to your mates. I won’t say that I have never felt afraid.”

In 2008, Stevens took part in a challenging tour of Afghanistan as part of Operation Herrick 8. On September 12, 2008, while serving as a corporal, he performed remarkable acts of gallantry in Helmand Province that led to the award of the CGC. His official citation stated: “Corporal Stevens was an Afghan National Army platoon mentor operating in support of an ANA unit deployed at Patrol Base Attal in the Gereshk Valley. On September 12, he and his six-man Operational Mentor Liaison Team (OMLT), with a small group of ANA, were patrolling northeast of the patrol base to dominate the surrounding vegetated Green Zone.

“A local national approached the patrol and warned them of a sizeable enemy force in the vicinity intent on ambushing the patrol. Stevens pushed forward with six men to secure a compound from which he could observe the area. Approaching the mud-walled compound, he had a sudden meeting engagement with eight Taliban who engaged with heavy small arms fire. Instinctively, Stevens charged the enemy, firing from the hip as he advanced. With his initial response, he killed two enemies, wounded another and



## HERO OF THE MONTH

forced the remainder to withdraw and take cover in a field of corn, 7ft high. "The enemy quickly established a firm footing and resumed fire. Stevens no longer had the advantage as he was under effective small arms and RPG fire. Stevens rallied his five men to him and organised them to try to win the firefight. Concurrently, a second OMLT patrol manoeuvred to the west to put in

a flanking assault while the fire support team cued up 105mm artillery and an airstrike. Stevens decided to hold his position throughout the offensive support engagement despite being less than 135yds from the target, to fix them in position for destruction. He and his men applied controlled fire, preventing enemy egress."

### Danger close

"Following the successful fire mission and flanking assault, Stevens led an assault on a further enemy position which was suppressing from 110yds away. Stevens led from the front and assaulted with grenades and his personal weapons, supported only by his small team. His quick and aggressive attack accounted for most of the enemy, forcing the remainder to fall back under his onslaught. The battle continued for over three more hours. A further ten

Taliban positions unveiled themselves and engaged the two OMLT patrols. Depleted stocks of ammunition now forced the OMLTs to withdraw.

"Stevens moved his men, still under heavy fire, into a position where they could suppress the enemy and thus extract the other OMLT. Stevens remained in position as close air support and 105mm guns conducted 'danger close' fire missions. Stevens stayed firm, dominating the enemy until his paired patrol gained relative safety. Only then did he fall back and join them.

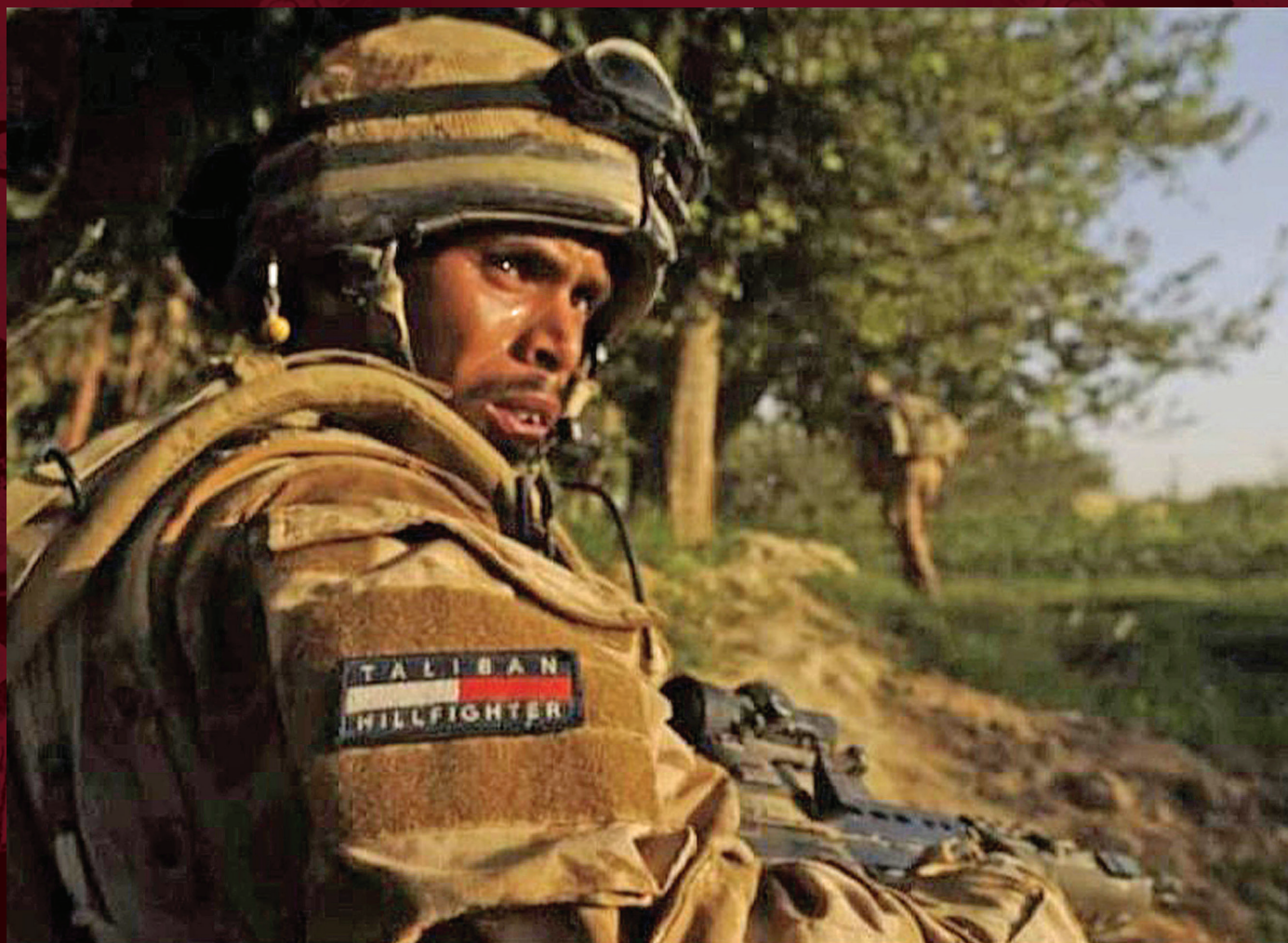
"Stevens displayed extraordinary courage, selflessness and leadership. He personally engaged and killed several Taliban fighters and set conditions for the defeat of a strong enemy force.

"His actions ensured the enemy never again appeared in such strength in the Attal area during Op Herrick 8. Stevens' outstanding gallantry was witnessed by



THE US ARMY ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL ALSO BESTOWED ON STEVENS COURTESY OF LORD ASHCROFT

*"You just have to take control in a firefight, remembering that as well as yourself, you have your men to deal with. You don't question it; you just get on with it"*



SERGEANT STEVENS IN THE FIELD COURTESY OF ALWYN STEVENS



