

## The weekend Australian

# Kuga the dog's courage under fire recognised with medal



Kuga on patrol in Afghanistan.

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Kuga the military working dog has become the first Australian animal since World War II to be awarded for gallantry over an extraordinary act in Afghanistan in which he alerted his handler to an ambush position then engaged the enemy.

Kuga, a Belgian Malinois, was yesterday posthumously awarded the PDSA Dickin Medal for actions described as heroic by Corporal Mark Donaldson VC, who is a former SASR military working dog handler.

Corporal Donaldson accepted the PDSA Dickin Medal on behalf of Kuga and SASR, and said: "There's no doubt in anybody's mind that he saved lives and he showed so much loyalty and courage. He wouldn't give up on his mates and doing his job."

“Kuga and the other military working dogs we all served with in Afghanistan saved countless lives, whether they were finding IEDs or tipping us off to an enemy presence before we’d seen them.”

The PDSA Dickin Medal was created in 1943 to honour the work of animals in war and has been awarded to 71 individual animals, including two Australian carrier pigeons in World War II.

Kuga served with the Special Air Service Regiment from 2008 and was recognised for his actions during a patrol in Oruzgan province on August 26, 2011.

During a patrol, Kuga alerted his handler to an enemy presence ahead. Released by his handler to investigate, Kuga crossed a river to expose an enemy ambush position, drawing small arms and heavy machinegun fire.

Despite being shot five times, Kuga continued to engage the enemy until being recalled by his handler.

Kuga was evacuated by helicopter and treated at coalition medical facilities in Afghanistan and Germany. He died in Australia the following year, likely as a result of stress and physical trauma associated with his wounds.

PDSA trustee Mary Reilly presented the medal and praised Kuga’s drive and courage in the face of the enemy.

“If it wasn’t for Kuga’s actions that day in Afghanistan, his handler and the Special Operations Task Group patrol would have walked into the enemy ambush, with potentially devastating loss of life,” Ms Rei