

Johnson Beharry

Audio Guide transcript

In 2005, Beharry became the youngest ever recipient of the Victoria Cross - Britain's highest award for gallantry. He's one of only 12 living recipients. The VC - the medal on the left of this picture, next to two service medals - was awarded to him by the Queen for his extreme courage in saving the lives of over 30 soldiers in Iraq.

Beharry remembers when he was first told that he'd won the VC.

'I was fine because I didn't even know what the Victoria Cross was so when I was told about it I was not in shock or anything like that. Because I didn't realise how big it was, because I already had the Kosovo medal, so I was just thinking it's the next medal but it's a lot more to it. It's brilliant. I mean to be one of twelve in the whole world, it's amazing.'

Seen from close up, the red markings of Beharry's uniform draw our eye to the scars on his head: the result of the huge injuries he suffered in Iraq.

'The scar running over my head is from the operation. Because on 1st May 2004, I had a 7.62 bullet went through my helmet and just barely grazed me at the top of my head. And on 11th June 2004 I received next injury where a rocket-propelled grenade detonated 6 inches from my face and ... I get hit on the right hand side of my head. Looking at it, it is on the left-hand side. That is the reason why they had to open my head to reveal my forehead, reveal my eye socket and my nose because all of it was smashed.'

Beharry gives his own response to his portrait.

'The face is really serious. Maybe at the time because I'm in uniform. When I'm in a uniform it's like a different frame of mind. Something else take over. I guess that's why my face is like that. Maybe if I was in civilian I would have been more relaxed, smiling, because I smile quite a lot. This is a soldier face because I remember she kept telling me 'smile, smile, smile' but it's hard to get me to smile when I'm in uniform, I don't think a soldier should be smiling.'

To me, it's just a portrait. But looking at it with the Victoria Cross there's a lot more to it because the Victoria Cross represent the lives that I saved in Iraq so that mean a lot to me. '

Beharry, to his great disappointment, is no longer on active service.

'To accept that I can't do the job that I actually joined the army to do and trained to do - it's really difficult ... I don't like desk job...I joined the army to be an infantry soldier. And when I was told I wouldn't be able to do that anymore, it was really disappointing.'

I'm trying to get over it, it's a bit difficult, but I think I will one day.'