

Senior Aircraftman James Smart, from No 2 (Mechanical Transport) Squadron, Royal Air Force, was killed in a road traffic accident in southern Italy on Wednesday 20 July 2011.

Senior Aircraftman (SAC) James Smart, a member of No 2 (Mechanical Transport) Squadron [2 (MT) Sqn] within No 85 (Expeditionary Logistics) Wing, deployed from RAF Wittering, by road, to southern Italy on 17 July 2011. He was part of a 10-vehicle convoy delivering vital equipment to UK Forces at Gioia del Colle in support of Operation ELLAMY. On the afternoon of 20 July 2011, SAC Smart was involved in a fatal road-traffic incident near Vasto, in southern Italy.

SAC Smart was born on 18 August 1988 in Chester, and his family home was in Hawarden, Deeside. Prior to joining the Royal Air Force in 2008 he was a member of the Territorial Army. He completed his Phase 1 airman training at RAF Halton between April and August 2008. From there, he progressed to his Phase 2 driver trade training at the Defence School of Transport, Leconfield, and was posted to 2 (MT) Sqn in November 2008, having successfully completed his course.

During his first year on the Squadron, SAC Smart undertook numerous tasks around the UK and in Europe. Between May and September 2010, SAC Smart deployed to Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, as an MT driver within the Joint Support Unit MT Section. There he demonstrated his ability to lead, and effortlessly assumed the acting rank of corporal in the busy MT section.

SAC Smart was due to receive his Operation HERRICK medal from the Station Commander at RAF Wittering at a medal ceremony to be held on 1 August 2011.

On his return from Afghanistan, SAC Smart was quick to volunteer to deploy to Mount Pleasant Airfield in the Falkland Islands between October 2010 and January 2011.

SAC Smart had been heavily involved with Operation ELLAMY since it began in March this year. He was on the initial convoy of 20 vehicles that deployed from the UK to Nancy Air Base, France for Exercise Southern Mistral. When operations over Libya began, this convoy was diverted in order to equip Gioia del Colle, to become the deployed operating base for the RAF Tornado and Typhoon aircraft. Once again, SAC Smart was quick to volunteer, and he remained in Gioia del Colle until May 2011.

On returning to 2(MT) Sqn in the UK, SAC Smart took part in further sustainment runs in support of Operation ELLAMY. SAC Smart was undertaking his fifth sustainment run in support of the operation when he died.

SAC Smart will be sorely missed by all those personnel with whom he worked on 2 (MT) Sqn, and the Squadron's thoughts are with his family at this very tragic time.

The family of Senior Aircraftman James Smart have made the following statement:

"James (Smarty) was a small man with a big heart, no one could have had a better son. He was

a much loved brother, uncle and friend. He brought joy and happiness to everyone who met him. He was proud to serve his country and died doing something he loved. He will be sadly missed by all his family and friends, and he has left a big hole in all of our lives. Good night God Bless, James."

Group Captain Richard Hill MA FCILT RAF, Officer Commanding Royal Air Force Wittering, said:

"SAC Smart, or 'Smarty' as he was affectionately known to his colleagues, was a dedicated and exceptionally hard-working airman. He was always keen to get 'stuck in', whilst continually wishing to advance his trade skills. There is no doubt that he had a promising career ahead of him in the Royal Air Force.

"A great sportsman, he was always keen to compete in team competitions, and represented both his squadron and station. He was also blessed with a warm heart and a great sense of humour. As a result, he was extremely well liked amongst his peers, and popular with all those with whom he worked.

"He was, without doubt, a great ambassador for not only his squadron but also for RAF Wittering and for the Royal Air Force as a whole. He will be sadly missed by all his family, friends and everyone who knew him."

Squadron Leader Wayne Tracey, Officer Commanding No 2 Mechanical Transport Squadron, said:

"SAC Smart was quite simply larger than life in every conceivable way. Popular, well-respected and dedicated, he possessed a rare, infectious cheek that often got him out of the most difficult situations. Smarty as he was known - was able to combine a tough competitive streak with a startling physical strength which he cultivated to surprise many opponents in sporting contests. He epitomised the term 'team-player' and consistently put others needs before his own, often to his detriment.

"His approachable and permanently cheerful attitude ensured that he was widely liked across the Station. Smarty was typically at the forefront of everything he did even to the extent of parading next to people a foot taller than him to ensure he was the lead man. Even at this early stage of his career, it was all about how he could benefit the team for Smarty, often at his own expense, and again this selfless characteristic contributed to his overwhelming popularity.

"It was typical of the man that, despite his recent return from Afghanistan, he was determined to support the wider RAF effort to supply equipment to Gioia Del Colle, prior to a posting that, I am convinced, would have fulfilled his wish for a swift return to operational employment. Determined to quickly gain a wide experience of his trade, the whole senior management of my squadron is adamant that he would have deservedly and swiftly advanced in rank.

"In a squadron of 'can-do' people, SAC Smart stood out. He was an exceptional man, a true ambassador for his profession and No 2 (MT) Squadron is an emptier place without him. Most

of all, our thoughts go out to his family."

Members of the No 2 (MT) Sqn detachment attached to 904 Expeditionary Air Wing, currently deployed on Op HERRICK in southern Afghanistan, sent the following messages:

Sergeant Andy Bethwaite, 2 (MT) Sqn said:

"When I think of Smarty I think of a wide and contented grin. Then I realise with a terrible and awful jolt that it's a grin that we won't see any more. It's a happy grin that I first saw as he burst into LAC Flight. It's a grin that became even wider whenever he was involved in banter (particularly when we presented him with a small child's booster seat in Italy). It's a grin that we saw whenever he was driving with his beloved Squadron, with his mates. It's an infectious grin that accompanied him wherever he went and it's a grin that we will always remember.

"Smarty was an airman who I would like to have carried around in my pocket and get out in times of dire straits – a deployable 'super-airman'. Totally reliable, completely dependable and utterly devoted to the Service that he loved so much, Smarty was without doubt someone to keep an eye on in the future and he would have rapidly made his way through the ranks. His skillset, mindset and outlook were of the highest calibre. The standard he set for his peers was quite simply too hard to follow and keep up with – he left them choking in his dust. Professional, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, likeable, hugely popular and ambitious are but a few words to describe SAC Smart.

"Our proud Squadron will be all the weaker for this tragic loss and the pain of his passing will remain as an open wound until time, that great healer, takes its inevitable hold. My memories of Smarty will never completely fade though – he will always pop up in a happy memory and undoubtedly elicit a Smarty-esque wide grin. You don't forget people like Smarty, it's impossible."

SAC Crawford, 2 (MT) Sqn said:

"SAC 'Smarty' Smart was a bubbly character, he was always smiling and he could brighten up any room he walked into. Smarty loved his career, he was a very keen worker and he would always be the first to volunteer for any job that came up. He will always be remembered and will be deeply missed. Sleep tight angel, rest in peace."

Corporal Phil Bugg, 2 (MT) Sqn said:

"SAC Smart was one of the most dedicated lads I ever had the pleasure of working with. No matter how hard the job, Smarty always did that job with the biggest smile on his face. He is a true legend of 2 MT Sqn and will deeply be missed and be remembered as one of our finest. My heart goes out to you and your family during this hard time. Rest in peace young Smarty, you're a real hero."

From personnel at 2 (MT) Sqn, RAF Wittering:

Flight Lieutenant Liz Wheatley, Officer Commanding Ops Flight, 2 (MT) Sqn, said:

"New to the Sqn, I deployed with the convoy taking kit on Ex SOUTHERN MISTRAL to France which in turn was redeployed to Italy in support of Op ELLAMY. SAC Smart was on that convoy and was an airman that made a great impression for all the right reasons from the 'get-go.' Quick to volunteer and get fully involved with a task, he was also a guy who had a great sense of humour; a guy who could even laugh at himself (even if it was about a booster-seat!). Smarty you will be missed, stay safe."

SAC Houston, 2 (MT) Sqn, said:

"Smarty, a true gentleman, big heart and loved by everyone he met. The hardest grafter and always wore a smile. RIP Buddy"

SAC Matthew Wiley, 2 (MT) Sqn, said:

"Smarty" Smart you will be missed by everyone. You're a true record of 2(MT) Sqn and the whole MT Trade. It has been an absolute pleasure and honour to have known you and worked with you! You are my wing man and always will be. RIP Smarty, see you on the other side!"

SAC Marc Whale, 2 (MT) Sqn, said:

"Small man, BIG heart. No words could ever describe what a top lad and true friend you were. You will never be forgotten. Rest in peace Smarty."

SAC Grahame Blyth, 2 (MT) Sqn, said:

"John Smart was the best man I have ever worked with and will be greatly missed by everyone. RIP Mate."

SAC Craig Gallon, 2 (MT) Sqn, said:

"You will be truly missed Smarty. One of the best lads I have known. You will always be in our minds at work. Will have a pint for you."

SAC Nick Stanley, 2 (MT) Sqn, said:

"It was an honour to work with you and be your friend, you will be sorely missed. 'Chicken please!'"

SAC Darren Gregory, 2 (MT) Sqn, said:

"SAC John Smart was a credit to his family, friends, Service and country. An absolute pleasure to have known, served and worked beside. Like the elephant on our sleeves that united us, we will never forget you! A legend till the end! Sleep well Smarty."

SAC Scotty Scott said:

"Smarty was a credit to his family, friends and colleagues, his service and his country."

Cpl Sarah Heydon said:

"We have so many good memories of you that we will all cherish at 2MT. Sorry for keeping calling you Skittles."

SAC Austin 'Temps' Temple said:

"No one ever had a bad word to say about him."

SAC Kenny Stubbs said:

"He was a little man with a big personality and a massive heart."

SAC Mark 'Trigger' Hodgson said:

"You would have been proud of our night out that we had for you."

Cpl Robert 'Yorkie' Yorkston said:

"They say the best things come in small packages. You were proof of that."

The Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox, said:

"I was deeply saddened to learn of the death of Senior Aircraftman James Smart in an accident in Italy. He was deployed in support of Operation ELLAMY and was providing a vital supply link for the RAF in their role protecting the civilian population of Libya. My thoughts go to his family and friends at this extremely sad time."