

Christmas at Arlington Cemetery, Virginia

Rest easy, sleep well my brothers. Know the line has held, your job is done.
Rest easy, sleep well. Others have taken up where you fell, the line has held. Peace, peace,
and farewell...

These wreaths - some 5,000 - are donated by the Worcester Wreath Co. of Harrington, Maine. The owner, Merrill Worcester, not only provides the wreaths, but covers the transport expenses as well. He's done this since 1992. A wonderful guy. Also, most years, groups of Maine school kids combine an educational trip to DC with this event to help out. Making this even more remarkable is the fact that Harrington is in one of the poorest parts of the state.

31 December

CORPORAL LIAM 'ELMSY' ELMS ROYAL MARINES
10 TROOP, Z COMPANY, 45 COMMANDO ROYAL MARINES

Corporal Elms was killed in action by an explosion on the 31st December 2008 in Southern Helmand on operations with Zulu Company, 45 Commando Royal Marines. The Company was conducting a local area patrol alongside Afghan National Army troops in order to reassure the local population. He is believed to be the 50th UK fatality in Afghanistan in 2008.

Corporal Elms or 'Elmsy' as he was known was born on 28th October 1982 in Wigan. He joined the Royal Marines on 7th May 2001. After completing training at the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines (CTCRM) at Lympstone in Devon, he served with 42 Commando Royal Marines for 2 years. During this time he saw active service in Northern Ireland (Op BANNER) in 2002, and then again in Iraq in 2003 as part of the UK contribution to Operation TELIC. Returning to the UK Corporal Elms completed his Junior Command Course, and Skill at Arms course where he was awarded top student. He subsequently trained as a Platoon Weapons Instructor Class 2 at CTCRM. Remaining at CTCRM he was responsible for the training of recruits, a task in which he took immense pride, ensuring the next generation of Royal Marines were ready to take their place in a Commando Unit. His hard work and professionalism was rewarded when he was given his preferred appointment to Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines, based in Faslane where he was able to further his passion for shooting and represented the Royal Marines as a member of the Corps (Royal Marines) Shooting Team. He then joined 45 Commando Royal Marines on 7th January 2008 deploying to Norway with the Unit before commencing pre-deployment training for operations in Afghanistan.

A physically strong and powerful man he was a keen Rugby League fan and also played for the Corps Rugby League Team. Corporal Elms had a great sense of humour and despite his professional pride he could never take himself too seriously; he always had a ready laugh and

liked nothing better than to reminisce about the lighter side of being a Royal Marine with his friends. Liam was a dearly loved son to his father Michael, of whom he often spoke and was in constant touch. He also spoke lovingly of his fiancée, and he was busy making plans for the future with her during this deployment to Afghanistan. His death will be felt by all who he influenced but mostly by his family and by those he served alongside. All who knew him will mourn the passing of a dear friend and an exceptional Royal Marine.

Lieutenant Colonel Jim Morris Royal Marines, Commanding Officer, 45 Commando Group, said : Corporal Elms was an outstanding Royal Marine and a huge personality. Fit, strong, courageous and very good humoured he died leading his section from the front, doing the job he loved in the company of his friends who had tremendous trust in him and a huge respect for his abilities as a Commando and as a Leader. The determined commitment and bravery that he has shown throughout the conduct of numerous operations over the last few months has been an example to all and his loss has been felt very deeply throughout 45 Commando. He will be remembered for the energy and enthusiasm that he had for his profession but also for the generosity of spirit that he extended to all. He will be greatly missed but never forgotten and his tragic death will serve to further strengthen the resolve and determination of his comrades throughout these challenging times. I know that every member of 45 Commando joins me in sending my very deepest condolences to his fiancée, close family and friends of whom he was so proud.

Major Andy Muddiman Royal Marines, Officer Commanding Z Company Group, said: Corporal Elms was a very likeable Junior Non Commissioned Officer, who had a generous and gregarious character. His hallmarks at work were utter professionalism and complete application to the task in hand. As a character he was jovial, big hearted and strived constantly to do his best. His contribution to both the training and leadership of the Company has been considerable. His interests both within the Corps and at home centred on his passions for shooting and marksmanship, in which he excelled. He became the authority within Zulu Company on section level tactics and equipment. Corporal Elms lived and breathed his job, exuding an enthusiasm for soldiering that was instantly infectious. He had Commando qualities in spades: most of all he was unselfish, brave and determined. An exceptional leader he never flinched from a dangerous task and the manner in which he died, leading from the front, was typical of the way he chose to live.

Captain Ben Cassells Royal Marines, Troop Commander Z Company Gp, said : "Bend your knees, just bend your knees!" My first memories of Corporal 'Elmsy' Elms will always bring a smile to my face. Joining Z Coy at the same time, we both deployed directly on the Norway exercise this year. They say Norway changes you, but for 'Elmsy', I think he changed Norway. The fastest Bookneck (Royal Marine) on two planks (skis), he was always found at the front of an attack, skiing directly towards the enemy position, only to ski straight past it and beyond into the nearest snow drift. His refusal to let a small thing beat him, or anything else for that matter, just goes to prove his drive and determination: Commando qualities we would all come to rely upon, well...that and his kit collection anyway. I honestly believe that everyone in 10 Troop has some pouch, zip, clip or whistle (all 'gucci' and made by Blackhawk of course) 'borrowed' from

'Elmsy'. Despite the banter we used to give him, he actually had some good kit, but don't tell him we said that.

A Section Commander of the highest quality, 'Elmsy' was always a key personality in a very tight knit family. Throughout his operational deployment he led his Section with pride and dedication always taking the fight to the enemy. You will be missed by us all and I take great pride in calling you a friend. Take care and rest easy.

2Lt Hugh Mackay Officer Commanding 10 Troop Z Company Gp, said : Corporal Elms was one of life's true enthusiasts, a wonderful character and a natural leader. He was a dynamo of energy to the end. Despite my short time in his company, Corporal Elms made a lasting impression on me, happy to lend a hand to anybody in the FOB (Forward Operating Base). He will be sorely missed by everyone who has been fortunate enough to have met him.

Sergeant Tomo Tomkins Royal Marines, Troop Sergeant 10 Troop Z Company Gp, said : I first met 'Elmsy' on joining Zulu Company for pre-deployment training. It is fair to say I liked him from that first meeting. A big man with a big heart, who would always have time for a dit-spinning (story telling) session, whether you wanted one or not! Only a month ago during an engagement with the enemy, 'Elmsy' badly twisted his ankle but with true Commando spirit, he made no fuss and continued on with the patrol. Soon afterwards, he discovered that he had broken his ankle and was returned to Camp Bastion for treatment. He hated every minute of being away from his Section (although being near Camp Bastion's Pizza Hut was seen as a positive!) and as soon as he was physically able, he returned to the Troop and continued commanding his Section from the front.

It was a pleasure to serve with you Royal and even though I only knew you for a short time, I know that I can call you a friend; you will be missed both professionally and personally by all members of 10 Troop Zulu Coy. Goodnight brother.

Corporal Lee Birkin Royal Marines, Section Commander 10 Troop Z Company Gp: Me and 'Elmsy' go back a few years since meeting at CTCRM on course. He took great pride in his personal kit and equipment and was a real pro. I think it's a fair one when I say that I was round his grot (accommodation) every two minutes asking him, 'what does this or that piece of your kit do?' And I kept this up for years after as well. I was not the only one, Corporal Bishop did it too. 'Elmsy' loved shooting both at work and in his spare time. Whenever the chance arose, he would show off the latest CQB (Close Quarter Battle) stance or a new way of holding and firing a pistol. Dedicated members of the KFC club on a Friday travelling home together, 'Elmsy' was often seen destroying a Family Bucket, well, I think the words used is that he was 'devastating it at close range'. Always keen to lead from the front, his self proclaimed 'OPTAG Black Thursday' left him covered in the River Wissey bog, and the words 'three crates down' could never be mentioned in his presence without a pyrotechnic reaction! This and many more dits that can only be spun by those who knew him best sum up the character that was 'Elmsy'. A fine Section Commander who had the respect of everybody around him, a Bootneck through and through and an all round good bloke, sorry to see you go mate.

24 December

LANCE CORPORAL BENJAMIN WHATLEY
LIMA COMPANY, 42 COMMANDO ROYAL MARINES

Lance Corporal Whatley was killed in action on the 24th December in Nad-E-Ali District, central Helmand on operations with Lima Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines. The Company was conducting an operation to clear enemy forces from the north of the district. Leading his men from the front, Lance Corporal Ben Whatley was killed by enemy fire during a prolonged and fierce battle with insurgents.

Benjamin Whatley was born on the 29th July 1988 and his home town was King's Lynn. He joined 42 Commando Royal Marines as a rifleman in Mike Company. It was during this formative stage of his career that he deployed to Afghanistan for the first time on Operation HERRICK 5; a hugely successful tour, it saw Ben realise his potential as an infantryman and he began to grow into a junior commander, relishing any opportunity to step into the breach and provided an example for others to follow.

A brief respite after that tour saw Ben deploy to the Indian Himalayas on Exercise HIMALAYAN WARRIOR, a test of physical endurance, determination and soldiering at high altitude in the harshest and most unforgiving environments. This change of scenery was short-lived as Pre-Deployment Training started in earnest for this current tour of Afghanistan, yet this time Ben had a clutch of junior marines looking to him for sage counsel, guidance and inspiration - a role that he assumed naturally.

Lieutenant Colonel Charlie Stickland Royal Marines, Commanding Officer, 42 Commando Royal Marines said: "Another 'Smiley Boy' from 42 Commando lost whilst doing the job he loved, in an environment in which he excelled and surrounded by his mates. His loss has rocked the entire Commando, particularly the tight and combat hardened band of warriors that are 'Lightening' Lima Company.

"Lance Corporal Ben Whatley sat at the heart of a group of comrades bound together through rugged shared experiences, with strength of friendship that many cannot understand. He had truly earned his Lance Corporal's stripe and had so much more to give. All he served with knew him as a 'Proper Bootneck' and an uncompromising friend. His loss bonds us tighter and makes us all the more determined to maintain the initiative against our foe. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and other loved ones at this tragic, tragic time."

Major Rich Cantrill Royal Marines- Officer Commanding Lima Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines said: "Lance Corporal Ben Whatley was a tough, uncompromising Commando and his loss leaves a huge void in the hearts and minds of the men of Lima Company. Promoted just prior to this Afghanistan deployment, his advancement was richly deserved and it was my pleasure to see his calm delight (he almost smiled!) when the Commanding Officer handed him his badge of rank. Tall with a booming baritone voice, Ben Whatley had in abundance that magic ingredient of 'Presence'. Every inch a Royal Marine, he was the natural choice to fill a Section Second-in-Command appointment. A veteran of Afghanistan, Ben knew how to fight and I saw him with my own eyes during the Battle for Zarghun Kalay, winning the fire fight against tough insurgent opposition; this is what Ben was doing when he was killed, fighting

from the front for his friends, for his team, for his Company. We will all miss Ben and the chance to watch him fulfil his tremendous promise yet I will remember him as an ever-young Commando; a fighter, a man's man, a Royal Marine to the core."

Captain Oli Truman Royal Marines- Officer Commanding 9 Troop, Lima Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines said: "Ben was a proper 'Bootneck' and a Commando through and through. The biggest man in the troop, he excelled at relentlessly winding up his Troop Commander, Troop Sergeant and most of the senior ranks in the Company with his jokes and his almost horizontal, laid back attitude. He was however, a particularly effective Marine and was the automatic choice for promotion to Lance Corporal. It was in this role that he excelled as a reliable and hardworking Section Second-in-Command, proving himself and his ability to lead his team during his time on HERRICK 9 and during especially fierce fighting recently. Ben's loss is a huge blow to the troop for we have lost an extremely promising and successful member of our close-knit team."

Corporal Luke Colman - Section Commander, 9 Troop, Lima Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines said: "I could not have asked for a better Section Second-in-Command than Ben Whatley. It was a job in which he excelled; I would ask for something to be done only to be told he'd done it twice already, half an hour ago! Ben was a superb soldier which he proved both on exercises & on operations. Immensely strong he would think nothing of carrying extra batteries or ammunition for the machine-gun and would still not be seen in anything other than a pukka fire position, going up and down the line encouraging the other lads when things were getting hard. More than all this he was a great friend to all the lads in the Section, me included. Words cannot express what a great loss this has been to all of us."

Marine Nick Knapman, 9 Troop, Lima Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines said: "Ben knew what was important to him and that was his family and friends. Always trying to stitch someone up with a prank, he was without a doubt the craftiest 20 year old I have ever met. Always the first one to want to go out for a drink, he was always the last one ready because in his own words: "it's not easy being this essence (good-looking)". No matter how much it pains me to say it, he was a maverick when it came to the ladies. With his laid back attitude it looked like he was never giving hundred percent but Ben loved his job and being a true Bootneck was all he knew, and he proved just that on the day he was taken away from us. See you soon Ben, but hopefully not too soon! You're going to be missed by all, especially those closest to you and I'll never forget you."

21 December

CORPORAL ROBERT CHRISTOPHER DEERING, ROYAL MARINES COMMANDO LOGISTICS REGIMENT

Shortly after 0715hrs on 21 December 2008 a VIKING armoured personnel carrier was involved in an explosion west of Lashkar Gah in Helmand Province, injuring three and disabling the vehicle. It was taking part in a routine move, following operations in the district of Nad-e-Ali. As Corporal Deering approached the stricken vehicle to assess the damage, a second

explosion occurred, killing him instantly.

Corporal Robert Christopher Deering was born on 16 October 1975 in Solihull and joined the Royal Marines in March 1998. Specialising as a Vehicle Mechanic, he spent the majority of his career at the Commando Logistic Regiment (CLR) Royal Marines, based in North Devon. During his time at CLR he deployed on operations to Kosovo, Iraq and twice to Afghanistan. He has operated in Oman and Egypt, and completed Arctic and Assistant Cold Weather Warfare Instructor training in Norway. Latterly, he qualified as a VIKING armoured personnel carrier operator and maintainer, and through demonstrating strong potential for command on operations in Afghanistan was promoted to Corporal in 2007.

Corporal Deering's great passions in life involved fast cars, maintaining the highest levels of fitness, and being with his fiancée Gemma. He was an immensely humble and cheerful man who impressed, and endeared himself to, all who were lucky enough to have known him. He always had a friendly word for anyone he met, and his charismatic smile and infectious laugh filled any room he entered. An excellent listener and a friend to many, Corporal Deering will be remembered fondly by all who had the privilege of serving with him. His hometown was Sheldon, Birmingham.

His Commanding Officer, Colonel Andy T W Maynard said: "Corporal Rob Deering had the heart of a lion and the courage to match. Having served on operations with the Royal Marines around the globe in Kosovo, Iraq and once before in Afghanistan he was no stranger to risk – but faced up to it displaying the finest qualities of the Commando Spirit: courage, determination, unselfishness and cheerfulness. The latter in particular was a trait that he is remembered for as a larger than life and popular man, who loved eating and drinking in good company. The mountain of Christmas parcels he received is testament to his popularity.

"At work in the Commando Logistic Regiment Royal Marines, where he had spent most of his career, he was well known and had recently qualified as a Vehicle Mechanic at the most senior level. His loss has been a tremendous shock to us all in this extended family, represented by our Regiment. Collectively, we reach out to support his parents, and his fiancée Gemma, and share their loss and their pain; our thoughts and prayers are with them at this time."

His Squadron Commander, Major Thornton Daryl Hirst Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers said: "An experienced and hugely popular member of the Squadron, Corporal Deering was always at the forefront of activity. First to volunteer, no matter how difficult or dangerous the mission, he led his Section with pride and had an innate temperament that had to be seen to be believed.

"A proud Royal Marine, impressive commander and exceptionally fit man, Corporal Deering will leave a void in many lives that will be impossible to fill. Cruelly and tragically taken from us, he will be missed greatly by all who had the privilege to know him. My deepest sympathy is extended to Gemma 'his best friend', his sister Elaine, his parents and all his family and friends."

Second in Command Armoured Support Group, Captain Scott Ashley Royal Marines said:

"Corporal Rob Deering was an outstanding Vehicle Mechanic and individual who thought nothing of going the extra mile in true Royal Marine fashion. He was never one to complain and always gave 100 per cent. He will be deeply missed by all those who worked with him in Armoured Support Group Royal Marines and the VIKING fraternity. Our deepest condolences go out to his fiancée, family and friends."

His Troop Commander, Captain Nicholas Vobe Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers said: "Corporal Rob Deering was an inspiration to the Troop. Joining straight from his Vehicle Mechanic Class One course, at the start of the pre-deployment training for Operation HERRICK 9, he made an impact instantly as a Section Corporal, leading by example.

"This example extended into his recreation, enjoying a quick session in the gym after work to prepare himself for a night on the town wearing his trademark spray on T-shirt.

"Corporal Deering spent the first two months of this deployment to Afghanistan in Kandahar, working as the Vehicle Mechanic Class One for the Queen's Royal Lancers 3rd Viking Troop. He subsequently deployed as an integral part of the Armoured Support Group Royal Marines, commanding the Viking Repair and Recovery Variant.

"My thoughts and that of the Troop's are with all of his family."

His Troop Colour Sergeant, Simon Nicholson Royal Marines said: "The first time I ever saw Corporal Rob Deering was a number of years ago at a petrol station in Barnstaple. I knew that he was a young Vehicle Mechanic who worked in the Light Aid Detachment and thought 'how the hell can he afford that nice BMW'. As I got to know Rob better, I learnt that he guarded his money extremely tightly. A typical example of this was that during the full six months of his first deployment to Afghanistan he only spent \$50!

"Rob was liked by all who met him, good looking, great "pecs" and a cheery smile; once you had met him you'd never forget him. He will be sorely missed, but never forgotten. My thoughts go out to his family, friends and most of all to his fiancée Gemma."

His Troop Sergeant, Peter Morley Royal Marines said: "I first met Corporal Rob Deering in the Light Aid Detachment at Commando Logistic Regiment in late 2001. He was a Marine, Vehicle Mechanic Class Two and all I knew about him at that point was that I had to give him a pound a week, as far as I knew it was paying for his expensive car. As it turns out, he was actually in charge of the detachment tea-boat fund!

"I have worked alongside Rob throughout my career; on the Assistant Cold Weather Warfare Instructors' Course, on a scuba diving expedition in Egypt, and even shared a VIKING with him on Operation HERRICK 5 in Afghanistan in 2006.

"Rob was one of the longest serving Vehicle Mechanics I have known and we shared many a good laugh together. I will never forget his smile and infectious giggle.

"He was a very professional Vehicle Mechanic and was one of the most experienced members

of the Troop. He will be forever remembered. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his fiancée Gemma, his parents and his friends."

Members of Viking Support Troop said: "The first thing that comes to mind when you think of Corporal Rob Deering is that he was 'tighter than a ducks arse'. He would never fork out for anything unless it was to pay for the thing he was most passionate about – an expensive car. However, his latest acquisition, a canary yellow Vauxhall VX220 hairdresser's car, will probably be up for auction at his kit sale and something tells me that we will probably get more money for his drill boots, which won't go down too well with Rob!"

"This was Rob's second deployment to Afghanistan. On the first tour Rob shared a tent with twenty eight others and as he slept near the controls for the heating and lights, the temperature was always perfect for Rob, which meant if he was 'icers', then everyone else was 'redders', and when he was awake the whole tent was awake."

"Rob was very fond of going to the gym. This was for two reasons – firstly, he proclaimed himself the best looking bloke in the Troop, and secondly, and more significantly, it was to counter his double, and sometimes triple, dessert eating habit."

"Rob loved working on the VIKING armoured vehicles, in fact he loved it so much that on one occasion he tried becoming a part of the vehicle by welding himself to the Viking's starter motor via his watch. Though he didn't succeed, it did leave a nasty scar on both his wrist and in his wallet when he had to buy a new watch, much to his disgust."

17 December

RIFLEMAN STUART WINSTON NASH 1 RIFLES

Rifleman Stuart Nash was killed in action during combat in Zarghun Kalay, Nad e Ali District, Helmand Province on 17 December 2008. He was wounded as he was covering comrades from a compound rooftop while working as part of the 1 RIFLES Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) Battle Group. His fellow Riflemen administered first aid and he was evacuated by a Medical Emergency Response Team helicopter, but subsequently died of his wounds.

An Australian citizen, Rifleman Stuart Nash was born in Sydney on 19th April 1987, and enlisted in The Rifles on 9th March 2008 in Gloucester. He attended the Combat Infantryman's Course at the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick, where he quickly established himself as a popular and confident character with maturity beyond his years and a positive influence on his peers.

Rifleman Nash's parents, Bill and Amanda Nash, said: "We are shattered of course by the news, but Stuart was doing what he most wanted to do in life, having harboured a wish for a military career since joining the cadets at the age of 13. He went to the UK to join up to get a better opportunity to do real soldiering, which he has done, if only briefly. He was a willing

volunteer; our soldiers have chosen their profession and we are, and will remain, proud of their willingness to make these sacrifices for the security of all of us who remain at home."

His company commander at Catterick, Major Robert Connolly, said: "He was a thoroughly professional young soldier who embodied the value of the British Army. His enthusiasm and approach to training were reflective of his desire to become an outstanding field soldier and to support his friends and colleagues".

After passing out of Catterick on the 19th September 2008, Rifleman Nash was assigned to the 1st Battalion The Rifles at Beachley Barracks in Chepstow. Following pre-deployment training in the United Kingdom he joined the battalion on operations in Afghanistan. He joined his mentoring and liaison team in Nad e Ali, a District Centre west of Lashkar Gah and recently the scene of intense fighting. In what can only be regarded as a baptism of fire, Rifleman Nash rapidly adapted to the austere life of a patrol base and established new friends among his fellow Riflemen, who quickly christened him "Oz".

Although the newest and youngest member of his team his gentlemanly manner and thorough professionalism instantly gained him acceptance. He was a polite man of strong faith who was always happy, and was always ready to put others before himself. If he was ever the man left behind, the returning patrol was always greeted with chopped wood for a fire and hot water for brews.

His Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Joe Cavanagh shared such a brew with Rifleman Nash and his friends the day before he was killed and remembered clearly his impressive and humbling loyalty, good humour, maturity and intellect.

He said: "Rifleman Nash was clearly thriving on the dual challenges of his own early professional service and the responsibilities of mentoring his Afghan National Army warrior colleagues. He was honest about the difficulty and danger of his work, modest about his own reserves of courage, robust and determined to succeed. He was already enthusing - utterly realistically - about joining the battalion's reconnaissance or sniper platoons after this operation in Afghanistan. He would have been superb in either. He fell a hero, in combat alongside his fellow Riflemen."

His OMLT Commander Major Mark Nooney said: "Nashie had only been in the Army for 9 months but already showed great potential. He was young, bright and ambitious. 21 years old, an Australian from Sydney with a background in mechanical engineering and a strong sense of duty, Stuart had decided he should come to Britain to join the Army to do his bit and see the world. He talked of his desire to buy a sports car and tinker with it on return to the UK, such was his constant, optimistic and industrious approach to life".

Identified as having the potential to do well as a NCO he was admired by his fellow Riflemen for his fitness, can-do attitude, big heart and thirst for knowledge.

Team Commander Captain Iwan Williams said: "He was one of the most promising new soldiers I have worked with; his intelligence and enthusiasm marked him out amongst his

peers. He instantly became a popular member of the team, always doing more than was expected and always with a smile. He will be missed greatly".

His friends from training and his mentoring and liaison team recall that he was undeterred by the dangerous side of soldiering and had joined the Army to do operational service – "proper soldiering" as he called it.

Corporal Joseph Nash, who shared the same name and had quickly become a friend, was with him when he was wounded. Corporal Joseph Nash said: "He was shot whilst calling out target indications and returning fire, all the time under heavy enemy fire. Despite being recently out of training he was a professional and a soldier in the best traditions of Australia and Britain.

"Once a Rifleman always a Rifleman. Swift and Bold."

15 December

LIEUTENANT AARON LESLIE LEWIS, ROYAL ARTILLERY

79 (KIRKEE) COMMANDO BATTERY, 29 COMMANDO REGIMENT ROYAL ARTILLERY

Lieutenant Aaron Lewis was killed in action on the 15 December in a Forward Operating Base near Gereshk in Central Helmand, whilst deployed on operations with 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery. Lieutenant Lewis was fatally wounded when the gun position he was commanding came under attack. He was flown to hospital in Kandahar but died shortly after arrival.

Lieutenant Aaron Lewis was born in Essex on the 4th December 1982. A 2:1 Graduate of Sports and Exercise Science from Loughborough University, he looked to satisfy his thirst for adventure and a physical challenge by joining the Army. He passed out of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst in April 2007. After completing the Royal Artillery Young Officers' Course he was posted to 29 Commando Regiment in Plymouth. Despite suffering a knee injury he showed incredible determination to pass the arduous All Arms Commando Course in June 2008. He deployed with his gun troop to Afghanistan in October 2008.

Lieutenant Lewis excelled at sports and was particularly keen on rugby, at which he represented Loughborough University. At Sandhurst, he qualified as a Mountain Leader Trainer and was in the process of organising an adventurous training expedition to France. Before joining the Army he was a physical training instructor which was evident from his determined approach to exercise and his keenness to involve his entire troop in physical training. He was well known for leading "spinning" classes which often tired out the toughest Commandos under his command.

Lieutenant Lewis was a natural leader whose selfless attitude was evident in all he did. In a short space of time he built up a strong reputation as an able officer. He was a proud family man and was full of appreciation for his parents (Barry and Helen), realizing that their hard work had given him the launch pad for the life upon which he was embarking. Through his charm he met Naomi and she soon became an inseparable part of his life. His loss will be felt

for many years to come.

Lieutenant Colonel Neil Wilson Royal Artillery, Commanding Officer, 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, said : "From the moment he arrived in 29 Commando Regiment it was apparent that Aaron was someone very special. We were all immediately struck by his maturity, professionalism and determination, the latter point being proven as he fulfilled a personal ambition of passing the Commando Course, despite suffering a bad knee injury. He frequently brought calmness to difficult situations, reassuring people by his presence and showing cheerfulness in adversity – a true Commando trait.

"He led his men from the front, his passion and vigour constantly on display, with the welfare of his soldiers always at the forefront of his mind; he genuinely cared for them. He was a lively mess character and if there was something going on there, he was usually at the centre of it. Always ready and willing to assist anyone who needed it, he quickly became popular with his witty conversation and engaging banter. He will be greatly missed by us all and our thoughts are with his family and friends at this very difficult time."

Major Rob Alsworth Royal Artillery, Battery Commander, 79 (Kirkee) Battery, said ; "Lieutenant Aaron Lewis was commanding F Troop, 79 Kirkee Commando Battery Royal Artillery. He was the young officer we all wished we could be, combining dedicated professionalism with an infectious thirst for fun and adventure. He threw himself into his career and loved commanding soldiers. A popular Troop Commander and natural leader, he fought hard to achieve the very best for his men and this evident compassion for his team was repaid with genuine respect. Whether being pushed to the limits on All Arms Commando Course or on operations commanding F Troop, he inspired the very best from his men.

"Aaron was motivated by all things active. He was in the midst of organizing a diving expedition to introduce himself and his soldiers to yet another new challenge. Aaron was at the centre of all things social, frequently organizing Mess parties. He was excellent at making new members and guests feel immediately at ease, usually with the help of Tequila!"

Warrant Officer Class 2 Greg Hamer Royal Artillery – Troop Sergeant Major, 79 (Kirkee) Commando Battery, said : "Having passed his Commando Course and earned the right to wear the coveted Green Beret, he was given the command of F Troop 79 (Kirkee) Commando Battery for Operation HERRICK 9. He showed professional leadership, dedication, enthusiasm, cheerfulness and selfless commitment; his approach to command and leadership was exemplary. With his high standards he was always approachable and willing to help with Troop matters, whatever the time of day. His enthusiasm for the welfare of the men under his command was a true mark of his character and selfless commitment to achieve the best for all the men in the Troop. His passion was physical training, with his legendary "spinning classes", which were never an easy session. With robustness and determination he led from the front in true Commando spirit. His strong, cheerful character will be missed by all."

Captain Alex Fries Royal Artillery – Officer Commanding Commando Training Wing, 29 Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery, said : "Aaron took his job very seriously, but never took himself seriously. He was one of my closest friends in the Regiment – he was the kind of man

who made a night out into a great night out through his infectious enthusiasm for any undertaking; the more absurd the better, including fancy dress.

"I knew him before he came to the Regiment and whilst he was on the Young Officers' Course. He would constantly harass me for advice about the Commando Course, for which he thrashed himself in preparation. I know how disappointed he was after he got injured on his first attempt, but by overcoming this, and completing the course he extolled the virtues of a Commando Officer."

4 Royal Marines killed in Afghanistan Friday 12 December 2008

The Ministry of Defence confirmed that on probably the blackest day for the U K Armed Forces since the beginning of Operation Herrick, four Royal Marines were killed in two separate incidents in the Sangin area of Helmand province.

In one incident, one Royal Marine from 45 Commando was killed as a result of an explosion in the Sangin area this morning. He was taking part in a routine patrol. Unfortunately he died of his wounds while being taken to the military hospital at Camp Bastion.

In the second incident, three Royal Marines, two from 45 Commando and one from Commando Logistics Regiment, were killed as a result of an explosion south of Sangin. X-Ray Company, 45 Commando Group, Royal Marines, was conducting an operation alongside Afghan National Army troops to dominate areas posing a dangerous threat to British forces and the local Afghan population. Sadly one Royal Marine died instantly, a second died of his wounds before he could be evacuated and the third died of his wounds in the hospital at Camp Bastion.

They were later named as:

CORPORAL MARC BIRCH, ROYAL MARINES 12 December 2008
6 TROOP, X-RAY COMPANY, 45 COMMANDO ROYAL MARINES

SERGEANT JOHN HENRY MANUEL, ROYAL MARINES 12 December 2008
COMPANY HQ, X - RAY COMPANY, 45 COMMANDO ROYAL MARINES

MARINE DAMIAN JONATHAN DAVIES, ROYAL MARINES
LANDING FORCE SUPPORT PARTY, COMMANDO LOGISTIC REGIMENT

Whilst acting as 2I/C of the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in support of a Company Operation, Corporal Marc Birch was killed by a suspected enemy suicide bomber. Despite the efforts of all those around him, Corporal Birch tragically died from his injuries at the scene of the incident.

Marc Birch, known as 'Birchy', was born in Northampton on the 23rd March 1982. After completing Royal Marines Commando Recruit Training in March 2000, he joined 42 Commando Royal Marines. He served at 42 Commando Royal Marines for seven years. During this time he gained considerable operational experience in Sierra Leone, Northern Ireland and Iraq. In 2005, he was promoted to the rank of Corporal and subsequently served in

the Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines (FPGRM) in April 2007 before moving on to 45 Commando Royal Marines in November 2007.

Corporal Birch was a proud 'Tankie', a Heavy Weapons Anti-Tank Specialist. As a Section Commander within 6 Troop, X-Ray Company, his responsibilities placed him at the vanguard of troop and company action. With his specialist skills he provided intimate fire support to the front line of the fighting troops with a variety of Crew Served Weapons; Heavy Machine Gun (HMG), Grenade Machine Gun (GMG) and the JAVELIN missile system. As an experienced Corporal he was instrumental in the success of his Troop and Company. His home was at Kingsthorpe, Northamptonshire.

He was a keen footballer and when serving at 42 Commando he played for the unit team on a regular basis and was a crucial member of the team when they won the Navy and Tunney Cup in 2000. As testament to his sporting ability, he scored the only goal against the Sierra Leone National Team when 42 Commando played them in Freetown. This fact was also an integral part of his comedy routine.

Corporal Birch was an outstanding character, a good friend and an absolute pleasure to work alongside. He had a cheeky, quirky sense of humour and never failed to see the bright side of life, this combination made him incredibly popular. His gregarious nature was enhanced with the attributes of courage and loyalty. He exemplified all the qualities any Royal Marine Commando would aspire to have. He hoped to progress through the ranks and serve in all of the Commando Units.

Lieutenant Colonel Jim Morris Royal Marines, Commanding Officer, 45 Commando Group, said: "Corporal Marc 'Birchy' Birch was an outstanding Royal Marine Commando and a popular and very capable leader. Courageous, determined, warm-hearted and with an impish sense of humour; he demanded high standards from his men but always motivated them by personal example and commitment. He has made a considerable contribution to 45 Commando and to the Royal Marines during his service with the unit and his approachability, engaging personality and loyalty was much respected throughout his Troop and his Company. He was killed by a suicide bomb whilst he was deployed at the forefront of an important operation to provide security to the people of Sangin. 45 Commando has lost both an outstanding individual and an important member of the team and he will be greatly missed by us all. Corporal Birch was also a devoted family man and I extend my very deepest condolences to his close family and friends as they come to terms with his loss."

Major Richard Maltby Royal Marines, Officer Commanding X-Ray Company, said: "Corporal Birch was the embodiment of a Royal Marine Commando. Continually cheerful and with a wry smile, he was courageous, determined and utterly professional; he died serving his country and helping his friends. It has been my absolute privilege to serve with somebody so dedicated and loyal; his conduct on operations was first class. Although bitterly saddened by this loss I know Cpl Birch would expect the Company to continue to take the fight to the enemy. His loss will be felt across the Company and the Battle group. However, my thoughts are with his family and Charlene, who he recently married. He will be sorely missed by all."

Warrant Officer 2 Jim Curran RM, Company Sergeant Major X-Ray Company, said: "Cpl Birch joined a newly formed X-Ray Company in November 2007. His knowledge, experience, high professional standards and drive were instrumental in shaping both the Fire Support Troop and X-Ray Company into a highly effective fighting force ready to deploy to Afghanistan. During Op HERRICK 9, 'Birchy' carried out his duties efficiently with determination, focus and thoroughness. With his wry sense of humour and Bootneck boldness, 'Birchy' was always great fun to be around both at work and 'ashore'. Cpl Birch was an exceptional Junior Non Commissioned Officer who embodied the highest standards and traditions of the Royal Marines. He will be missed by all of X-Ray Company."

Captain Luke Thomson, Officer Commanding 6 Troop Fire Support Group, said: "Corporal Birch was a highly popular member of X-Company and 6 Troop. Extremely professional and always willing to help out other marines within the troop, his knowledge and experience had proven indispensable throughout OP HERRICK 9. His dry sense of humour would get him out of most scrapes; mostly involving navigation as the troop found out in Norway, Wales and the Sangin Valley but his energy was infectious. All who knew him will miss him dearly and most of all, the men of X-Ray Company who saw him as a friend and as the epitome of a Royal Marine Commando."

Sergeant Neil Metcalf, 6 Troop Fire Support Group, said: "I was pleased to find that Birchy would be a Corporal in 6 Troop, X-Ray Company. Having known him for a number of years at 42 Cdo as a strong and dependable marine, it was evident that he would be an asset to the troop. His willingness for a few beers at the drop of a hat was impressive. Whilst on OP HERRICK 9 his sense of humour and work ethos was contagious amongst the troop. He will be greatly missed by me and all that knew him. Most of all his love for his family and wife was absolute. Our thoughts go out to them in their time of sorrow".

Corporal John Cowie, Javelin Section Commander, 6 Troop Fire Support Group, said: "Corporal Marc 'Birchy' Birch played a pivotal role within the Company. He was keen to pass on his knowledge and experience onto junior marines. Always seeing the best in people he would manage to get an extra mile out of all of those under his command. He would often work on the 1% rule - tell enough jokes and 1% of them would get the desired result. When ever a prank was played within the troop Birchy would be the ringmaster. Like a child with his hand caught in the cookie jar, Birchy would be found guilty by simply the grin on his face. It was obvious to all who knew Birchy that his family meant everything to him. Everyone knew how supportive his family were of his life within the Royal Marines, especially Charlene. He was so proud to be married that he spoke of her daily whilst deployed on operations. We will miss his laughter, his smile but most of all his great personality that inspired us all."

Marine Joe Hawley, 6 Troop Fire Support Group, said: "The term nicest guy can be used to describe Birchy. He was truly one in a million. His good humour and happy go lucky nature shone through in everything that he did. The junior marines within the troop feel fortunate to have worked with him so early on in their careers. We can only hope to aspire to be as good a Bootneck as Birchy, even if he was more "pussers" than a personal kit muster. His ability on the slopes of Norway earned him the nickname 'arctic fox' but his capability to go on a spontaneous run ashore was remarkable. He was devoted to his wife Charlene and extremely

close to his family. It was clear to all of us that he loved them very much. Everyone who had the pleasure of meeting him and who would put up with his abysmal jokes will sorely miss Birchy. From all of 6 troop - 'Never forgotten.'"

SERGEANT JOHN HENRY MANUEL, ROYAL MARINES

Whilst acting as the commander of the Quick Reaction Force (QRF), Sergeant Manuel tragically died from his injuries at the scene of the incident.

Sergeant Manuel, known as 'Manny', was born in the North East of England on the 11th November 1970. After completing Royal Marines Commando Recruit Training in September 1989, he joined X-Ray Company, 45 Commando Royal Marines. Manny was an 'Arbroath Orphan', an affectionate term used at 45 Commando for ranks stranded north of the border at weekends. He served for the majority of his career with the Fleet Protection Group, also known as Comacchio Group, and with 45 Commando Royal Marines. He also spent a brief spell at the Defence School of Driving, Leconsfield.

At this time both 45 Commando and Comacchio Group Royal Marines were based in Royal Marines Barracks Condor, Arbroath and Manny made many close friends and was very much a part of the 45 Commando family. During this time he gained considerable operational experience in Iraq (Op DRIVER), Belize and Kosovo (Op AGRICOLA). He was recently promoted to Sergeant, and came from Gateshead.

Sergeant Manuel was a Specialist Driver/Instructor and was also highly qualified in the field of logistics. He fulfilled a crucial role as the Quartermaster's Logistic Forward Representative within X-Ray Company; approaching this labour intensive and demanding role with vigour and passion and providing the company with the necessary stores and support required to achieve its mission. He also embraced any opportunity to patrol with X-Ray Company.

Sergeant Manuel was a martial arts and motorcycle enthusiast. He was particularly talented in Judo, a sport in which he excelled. On return from the current tour it was his ambition to establish a judo club in Condor, for the benefit of all ranks of 45 Commando Group Royal Marines based at RM Condor, especially the 'orphans'.

Sergeant Manuel was an industrious character and a good and loyal friend; his loss has left a void in the hearts of X-Ray Company and 45 Commando. His 'ball of fire' personality combined with his Geordie humour was well known and respected throughout the unit. He was approaching the end of his career in the Royal Marines and it was his aspiration to pursue a second career with the Police as an Advanced Motorbike Instructor.

Lieutenant Colonel Jim Morris Royal Marines, Commanding Officer, 45 Commando Group, said: "Sergeant 'Manny' Manuel was one of 45 Commando's biggest characters and had spent a huge proportion of his 20-year career serving with the unit. Dynamic, enthusiastic, forthright and always cheerful he was a much valued and respected member of the Sergeant's Mess, X-Ray Company, Motor Transport Troop and the Unit as a whole. His contribution to the Commando and to the Royal Marines was enormous whether he was deployed on operations or pursuing his love of martial arts and motorbikes. Extremely courageous and determined he

was killed by a suspected suicide bomb whilst playing an important part in an operation to provide security to the local population of Sangin and I know that the whole unit joins me in sending my deepest condolences to his partner and his family as they come to terms with the loss of such an inspirational individual."

Major Richard Maltby Royal Marines, Officer Commanding X-Ray Company Gp, said: "Sergeant Manuel was a larger than life character who had become part of the backbone of X-Ray Company. A limitless 'ball of fire', Sergeant Manuel was at the forefront of Company life. Hugely popular, he combined a mischievous sense of humour with a dedication and professional manner that was second to none. He died doing what he loved, commanding a detachment on operations and taking the fight to the enemy. His loss will not only be felt by the Company and Battle group, but also across the Royal Marines Corps. However, at this difficult and tragic time, my thoughts are with his family and his partner, Rachel."

Warrant Officer 2 Jim Curran RM - Company Sergeant Major X-Ray Company, said: "I have known Sergeant 'Manny' Manuel for nearly 20 years, having both served the majority of our careers in 45 Commando RM. I was incredibly proud that we were serving in X-ray Company together again. 'Manny' was an exceptional Royal Marine whose high standards, fortitude and leadership made him an integral part of the Company and we will be at a loss without his input. The enthusiasm, cheerfulness and sheer energy he displayed when undertaking his duties was an inspiration to all. Sergeant Manuel was an outstanding Royal Marine Sergeant displaying the highest standards throughout. A good friend, 'Manny' will be sorely missed by all."

Warrant Officer 2 Kev Cheeseman RM - Company Sergeant Major Zulu Company, said: "Manny was an extremely professional lad, who was always cheery and never had a bad word to say about anyone. He had a permanent grin on his face and always looked on the bright side of any situation no matter what it was. A Geordie through and through; he loved his home town as much as he did the Royal Marines. Manny was a truly outstanding individual who would help anyone without fuss or seek of reward. A truly professional, hard working Royal Marine, who was very proud of his background and of being a 'Bootneck', he smiled through all life's ups and downs. He will be missed."

Sergeant Sean 'Snatch' McKeown RM, 5 Troop, X-Ray Company, said: "'Manny' was small in stature but larger than life. You could always hear him before you saw him and when you met him his broad grin and sense of humour would instantly make you smile. I've known Manny for nearly 20 years. We've served as marines, corporals and sergeants together in Comacchio Group, Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines and 45 Commando Royal Marines. Like me, he tended to stay north of the border which meant we could get home to our beloved north-east more easily, having 'runs ashore' together in Newcastle at weekends. Manny was a wonderful friend but also every inch a Royal Marine; motivating, professional and thorough in every task he did. He had the courage of a lion and the personality of a hundred men. His sense of humour was infectious and when I had a bad day he was always there as a shoulder to 'drip' on. He would give you his last, but make you sign for it first. Cheers for the Newcastle Legends DVD but in my eyes you are The True Legend. I'll miss you Manny. Always your mate, 'Snatch'."

Sergeant David Thompson - Yankee Company. A close friend, he said: "I've known John since I was 13 years old, as young marine cadets! Even at this young age John possessed the 'Commando Spirit' in spades. He was a truly inspirational character, always with a cheeky smile on his face. He was the first Royal Marines Commando that I knew, who I looked up to with total respect. John was undoubtedly one of the main reasons why I joined the Corps, a true 'Bootneck' through and through. He will be missed by all but never forgotten. My thoughts are with his family during these hard times."

Corporal Michael 'Mick' O' Donnell. Machine Gun Section Commander, 6 Troop, Fire Support Group, said : "'Jacky' Manuel, 'Manny' or 'wor Jacky' as I preferred to call him was small in height but massive in personality with a big heart to match. Jacky was one of the most professional and hard working friends I've had. He always had time for a bit of a 'craic' and a 'hot wet' – no sugar. Whether it was to wind someone up for a joke or on a more serious note, to offer advice, Manny's laugh was infectious. It wouldn't take long for everybody around him to start laughing too, even if they didn't know what they were laughing about. If he had a bee in his bonnet on a bad day, you would still get a smile and a laugh out of him. I, myself, feel very privileged to have known the big-hearted Geordie 'wor Jacky' and things will never be the same without you around. I will miss you mate."

Marine Sam Laird, X-Ray Company Headquarters and Marine Chris Rogerson, 6 Troop Fire Support Group, said: Well what can we say about John, 'Manny'? We knew him from when we were kids, rolling about on the Judo mats, listening to his tales about the Marines (having rocked up ten minutes adrift, in true Bootneck style!) He would do anything for us, not caring about age. He was there when we needed lifts, needed someone to talk to and he was even there the when one of us was arrested. It would be fair to say we idolised him. If imitation is the highest form of flattery, we have done it to a 'T'. We chased him for our black belts, got our Green Berets and just like him, joined X-ray Company in our first draft in the Royal Marines. Somehow we managed to all meet up where we first started, here in X-ray Company on Op HERRICK. He put his rank aside when talking to us, constantly joking with each other, but behind closed doors we could sit and have a heart-to-heart and listen to his advice. Although sometimes we never took it, we always knew he was right. We will miss his banter and his words of wisdom and his departure will leave a hole in our lives. He was a best friend, true father figure and a Bootneck through and through. You will always be in our hearts and minds, forever missed but not forgotten."

A tribute from all the ranks of Motor Transport Troop 45 Cdo RM said: "Manny was a true professional. No matter what he was involved in he would do it with a mass of enthusiasm and passion; he always told it like it was and even though you knew you were right, with Manny you were actually wrong ! He was the 'Jack Russell' of the Royal Marines; small, feisty and hyperactive he did everything at "Mach 10". But no matter how busy he was, Manny always had time for a 'dit' (story) and a 'wet' (drink) session - normally the wet would always be finished before his dit! Manny was passionate about judo and was instrumental in setting up the 'Condor Judo Club', his passion, and knowledge will be sorely missed. His other passion was for motorbikes and if you couldn't find him in his office you could no doubt find him polishing his own bike inside the MT (Motor Transport) shed in preparation for taking it out for a spin after work. He had always wanted to ride hard and fast on the German autobahns and

his dream was set to come true on return from HERRICK 9 with his close-knit biker gang. Although he won't be able to make the trip himself now, we will still make the trip and legally pass the 100 in his honour. Manny made us all laugh and wouldn't want us to be sad for long which is easier said than done; we wish he was here now to make us all laugh again. We will miss him."

MARINE DAMIAN JONATHAN DAVIES, ROYAL MARINES

Marine Damian Jonathan Davies, born 20th October 1981, from Telford, joined the Royal Navy in March 2000, before transferring to the Royal Marines in November 2001. After initially joining 821 Troop he passed out for duty with 830 Troop in December 2002.

On completion of training Damian joined the Driver's branch and commenced his first draft at The Commando Logistic Regiment as a member of Landing Force Support Party. He subsequently qualified as a Staff Car Driver serving at Fleet Headquarters before moving to the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines. He returned to The Commando Logistic Regiment at the beginning of 2008 in preparation to deploy on to Afghanistan Op HERRICK 9.

An easy going and very hardworking Marine, Damian was one of the most experienced and professional members of his troop, a great friend and a trusted colleague. Damian Davies leaves behind a young son, and his wife who is expecting their second child.

His Commanding Officer, Colonel A T W Maynard, said: "The Commando Spirit resonates in every recollection of Marine Damian Davies. His courage was resolute as his tragic death in the front line is testament to. His determination and unselfishness are underscored by his reputation for being the first to volunteer for any tasks, and his cheerfulness is epitomised by the fact that nobody can remember him without a ready smile. At work his style was understated and selfless, and he had a reputation for working hard. Nevertheless, although he was a loyal and dedicated Royal Marine, his focus in life was his family - his wife Joanne and son Matthew. His extended family in the Commando Logistic Regiment share their loss and their pain, and our thoughts are with them at this time."

His Squadron Commander, Major Marcus Taylor Royal Marines said: "An experienced and popular member of the Squadron, Marine Davies was always at the forefront of activity and the first to volunteer from his Troop no matter how difficult or dangerous the mission. A proud husband and father, Marine Davies will leave a void in many lives that will be impossible to fill. Cruelly and tragically taken from us, he will be greatly missed by all who had the privilege to know him. Our thoughts are with his parents, wife and young family."

Officer Commanding X Company, Major Richard Maltby Royal Marines said: "Marine Davies was a consummate professional. Dedicated to his family, friends and the Royal Marines, his death is a tragic loss. A specialist in his field, he died while on operations with X-Ray Company Group, fighting the enemy and serving his country. Although this is a difficult time for us all, we will remain resolute. My thoughts are with his wife, Joanne, his son, Matthew and his unborn child."

His Troop Commander, Lieutenant Edward Argles MBE Royal Marines said: "Marine Damian Davies was one of the most professional and dedicated members of his troop. Always first to volunteer he could be relied upon to achieve any task given to him to the best of his abilities, usually with a cigarette in his hand, and wasn't content unless he'd completed the task fully, a true 'Bootneck'. Marine Davies had been sent to FOB NOLAY to join the Forward Logistic Node as one of the most experienced marines within the troop and was a massive support to his Troop Sergeant, while operating with 45 Commando Royal Marines. A very proud and loving husband and father, my thoughts and that of the troop's are with his young family."

His Troop Sergeant, Sergeant Kenyon said: "Marine Damo Davies was one of the strongest characters of the Troop, always joking and with a permanent smile on his face even in the worst conditions. He was once in the Royal Navy (which we never let him forget) but wanted a harder challenge and seeing the light, joined the Royal Marines. Unlike many, he never complained about anything and always put 110% effort into all he did. Damo never liked being stuck on camp and was always itching to get out on the ground to do the job he was trained for. Damo was well liked by all who knew him and by everyone who ever met him. He will be sorely missed and forever remembered by all."

Corporal Ben Parks and Marine Lee Douglas, 1 Troop LFSP said: "The first image of Damo was that of him sitting in his chair outside his tent, cigarette in one hand and a coffee in the other. In work Damo was the first to volunteer no matter what the task and he would make sure it was seen through to the end, never afraid of getting his hands dirty and not happy unless it was completed perfectly. Back in Chivenor, Damo was always talking of his wife Joanne and son Matthew; he loved and adored them with all his heart, and what a huge heart he had. Damo will be remembered as a 'Bootneck's' 'Bootneck', a true work horse, a great friend and a perfect husband and father. He will be greatly missed by all who had met and worked with him. Rest in peace Royal."

**LANCE CORPORAL STEVEN 'JAMIE' FELLOWS, ROYAL MARINES 12 December 2008
WHISKEY COMPANY, 45 COMMANDO ROYAL MARINES**

Whiskey Company, 45 Commando Group Royal Marines confirmed the death of Lance Corporal Steven Fellows Royal Marines, known to all as Jamie. He was killed in action on Friday 12th December 2008 in Sangin, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in a separate incident to that described above

Shortly before nine o'clock on Friday 12th December 2008 1 Troop Whiskey Company was conducting a foot and vehicle patrol in the Green Zone south of FOB JACKSON when a JACKAL vehicle struck an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in the Helmand River Wadi. All three of the vehicle occupants were wounded with L/Cpl Fellows' position as the vehicle commander taking the full brunt of the explosion. Despite a rapid withdrawal to the Forward Operating Base's medical facility, and subsequent evacuation by helicopter, L/Cpl Fellows was pronounced dead without regaining consciousness.

L/Cpl Fellows was born in Sheffield on 15th May 1982. Having joined the Royal Marines in November 2006 at the age of 24, he excelled in training being awarded the King's Badge as

best recruit in his Troop. In May 2007 he joined Whiskey Company, 45 Commando, and immediately threw himself fully into life in the Royal Marines. His sporting prowess was quickly noticed and in keeping with his tough, resilient nature he was selected to represent the Unit in the Royal Marines Boxing Championships and was subsequently invited to enter the Royal Navy Boxing Championships to represent the Royal Marines. Despite continued success, L/Cpl Fellows was single-minded in his determination to improve his skills as a field soldier and elected to concentrate fully on his professional development. Strong performances followed on exercises in both the UK and Norway. As a measure of his maturity and capability he was promoted to L/Cpl in April 2008, just 11 months out of training – a very notable achievement. A further measure of his precocious talent was his selection and subsequent success on the Royal Marines Sniper's Course, for which he was given just two days notice prior to attending.

Since deploying to Sangin, L/Cpl Fellows has excelled with his understanding of both low level tactics and the aims of the deployment of British Troops to Helmand have seen him perform faultlessly.

Jamie Fellows was a tough, compassionate man; highly motivated and mature, he typified the finest qualities of a Royal Marine Commando. A very popular member of his Company, he could engage in lively conversation with anyone; his wit, patter and comic timing were always underscored by a sharp and incisive mind. He was above all things devoted to his family and to his wife Natalie. Unabashed when he spoke of her, Jamie revealed such a deep love and affection for Natalie; all that heard him were touched by it. Jamie Fellows was proud to be a Royal Marine and fiercely loyal both to the Corps and his friends. He will be sorely missed by all.

Lieutenant Colonel Jim Morris Royal Marines, Commanding Officer, 45 Commando Group said: "Lance Corporal Jamie Fellows was one of the great talents amongst the Junior Non-Commissioned Officers currently serving in 45 Commando and we have lost a future leader of undoubted potential. Since the start of his career Jamie Fellows excelled. Whether it was winning the King's Badge as the best recruit in his Troop, gaining early promotion to Lance Corporal, becoming a sniper of great distinction or representing the Unit and subsequently the Royal Marines at boxing, he has made a huge contribution to this Commando. Intelligent, determined, tough and very good-humoured, he was one of the mainstays of his Troop and Company. He died whilst providing support to other members of Whiskey Company who were conducting an important ground-domination patrol in the Sangin area. 45 Commando has lost an outstanding junior leader and friend and I send my deepest condolences to his wife, family and friends of whom he was so proud."

Major Ross Preston Royal Marines, Officer Commanding Whiskey Company, said: "I consider myself very lucky to have known and served with Jamie Fellows. In my view he embodied everything that it is to be a Royal Marines Commando. Tough and courageous under fire, Jamie Fellows was an example to his comrades, fearlessly taking the fight to the enemy. In happier circumstances his self deprecating sense of humour was infectious and his wit merciless. I'll not forget his ability to talk freely with everyone regardless of rank or background on any manner of subjects. Jamie Fellows engendered trust and faith in all those he met in life and his decency and tenacity ensured he never let anyone down. In everything he

did Jamie Fellows had passion, most clearly seen in his evident devotion to his family and love for his wife Natalie; my thoughts are very much with them at this time. Jamie Fellows will be greatly missed and he will never be forgotten."

Lieutenant Tom Winterton, Officer Commanding 1 Troop, Whiskey Company said: "LCpl Fellows was an awesome marine who gave his very best to everything he did. I first met Jamie in Norway at the start of the year and he immediately impressed with his supreme physical fitness and the professionalism he applied to his soldiering. He spent the rest of the year completing the Sniper Course before rejoining the Troop to deploy to Afghanistan. He was a courageous man who was never fazed and was always there to inspire and lead his Section. He was a big character within the Troop and was respected by every man who met him. It's a privilege to have worked with Jamie, may he Rest in Peace."

Sergeant Tim Fulton, 1 Troop Sergeant, said: "Jamie was an asset to his Section and his Troop. Although he had only been in the Corps a relatively short time he had already proved himself as a Royal Marine Sniper, on the Boxing Team and through promotion to Lance Corporal. Jamie was always very outspoken, and always voiced his opinion even if you didn't know you wanted to hear it! He would always ensure that his Section was looked after and as the Troop Sergeant I knew that if Jamie was content, the whole troop was. Jamie had lived life to the full, having been a holiday rep before joining the Royal Marines, and took hold of every advantage the Corps had to offer. First and foremost Jamie was a very proud husband, which he talked about often. Jamie will be missed by the whole of Whiskey Company and our thoughts are with his family, especially his wife Natalie who he loved so much."

Close friend Marine Josh Green said: "Jamie/ Jay was always the most outspoken person in the Troop, if not the Company! Needless to say, he was one of the most popular as well. The reasons for his popularity are far too numerous to mention in full but it was his ability to live life to the max that sticks out the most. He was never one to let life pass him by and he had had a full and eventful life before ever becoming what he was to us in the Marines. It was so recently that we were swapping stories about his time as a rep in Ibiza. His confident and fun loving personality shone through with his sharp tongue and wit. There was also another side to Jay, one that he wasn't afraid to share with the lads, and that was how much he loved his beautiful (and didn't we know it) wife Natalie. He was besotted with her and spoke about their future at length. On a personal level Jay was a great friend right from our very first week at 45 Commando and in Whiskey Company together. We were completely comfortable in each other's company and would never hesitate to share our problems. In short, he was a colossus and will always be remembered as the wonderful and impressive man that he was. Our hearts go out to his wife Natalie and his friends and family. They are in our prayers."

Friends Marines Ben Gallagher and Rory Mair: "Jay will be remembered by us as a fun loving joker whose humour was greatly appreciated and helped everyone through the hard times. He was a remarkable friend and a unique bloke who never failed to impress. We feel so much for his wife and family; we will never forget him."

CORPORAL LEE CHURCHER 11 December 2008

The Ministry of Defence confirmed the death of Corporal Lee Churcher on Thursday 11 December 2008, while serving on operations in Basra, southern Iraq.

Cpl Churcher, who was serving with Headquarters 20th Armoured Brigade, was found at Basra's Contingency Operating Base having suffered a gunshot wound. Immediate medical assistance was provided, but sadly he was declared dead at the scene.

The incident, which occurred at approximately 2200hrs local time, will be subject to a full investigation. No enemy forces were involved and there is no evidence to suggest that anyone else was involved.

Corporal Lee Churcher enlisted into the Army in June 1994 and, after completing his initial training, was posted to Terra Troop, 13 Squadron, 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic). Showing early technical flare, he was apparently well-suited to the Military Geographic field. Hard work and natural aptitude saw him rise rapidly through the ranks to Corporal when he took the opportunity to move into the developing field of Information Technology (IT). His posting led him to a demanding job working as an Application Specialist with the Bowman communications training team in the UK.

In September 2007 Cpl Churcher joined HQ 20th Armoured Brigade (The Iron Fist) in Sennelager, Germany, where he was employed as an integral member of the Bowman training team. In this role his responsibilities required him to deliver training and mentoring to Brigade units during a complicated IT conversion programme - a role which required enthusiasm and dedication.

In November he deployed to Iraq with HQ 20th Armoured Brigade and was in the first month of a six month tour of as a member of the Brigade Headquarters staff.

He was employed in the complex area of surveillance and reconnaissance where he applied his skills to controlling Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to protect deployed troops on the ground. Following the tour of Iraq he had planned to transfer to the RAF and continue his development in the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) field.

Cpl Churcher was a keen rugby player and cricketer, with sports memorabilia and trophies decorating the walls of his room at his barracks in Germany. His two children meant everything to him and he would take any opportunity to proudly show photographs of them to his friends and work colleagues. He was 32 years old and separated.

LANCE CORPORAL DAVID KENNETH WILSON 4 December 2008

The Ministry of Defence confirmed the death of Lance Corporal David Kenneth Wilson on Thursday 4th December, 2008, while serving on operations in Basra, southern Iraq.

L/Cpl Wilson, who was serving with 9 Regiment, Army Air Corps, was found at Basra's Contingency Operating Base, having suffered a gunshot wound. Immediate medical assistance was provided, but sadly he was declared dead at the scene a short time later.

The incident, which occurred at 9am local time, will be subject to a full investigation. No enemy forces were involved and there is no evidence at this stage to suggest that anyone else was involved.

L/Cpl David Wilson (aged 27) was born in Huddersfield to Ian and Doreen Wilson. He joined the Army in August 2003, completing Phase 1 training at Army Training Regiment Pirbright in November that year. He moved to 668 (Training) Squadron at Middle Wallop for specific training as an Army Air Corps Ground Crewman before being posted to 9 Regiment Army Air Corps in his home county of Yorkshire.

Initially L/Cpl Wilson worked as a Ground Crewman in 672 Squadron, deploying to Afghanistan at the end of 2006 as part of Operation HERRICK 5. More recently he moved to 659 Squadron as the Stores Corporal, deploying to Iraq on Operation TELIC 12 with the Joint Helicopter Force (Iraq).

A real family man, L/Cpl Wilson leaves behind his fiancée Michelle Curry, his 11-week-old daughter Poppy, his parents, brother, family and friends. He was well known for his generous, kind-hearted nature and willingness to help others. He was one of the more experienced junior non-commissioned officers in the squadron and his positive and infectious nature made him a popular and respected friend and colleague for many.