PRIVATE GARETH LESLIE WILLIAM BELLINGHAM

3RD BATTALION THE MERCIAN REGIMENT (STAFFORDS) - COMBINED FORCE NAHR-E-SARAJ (NORTH)

Private Gareth Bellingham, from Stoke on Trent, was born on 21 November 1988. He enlisted in the Army in October 2007 and attended the Combat Infantryman's Course at the Infantry Training Centre, Catterick, before
joining the 3rd Battalion, The Mercian Regiment (Staffords). He completed the Warrior Armoured Fighting Vehicle Gunnery, Driving and Maintenance Courses in quick succession, and soon became his Company's best Warrior Gunner. A man with considerable driving experience, he undertook conversion training to operate Husky and Jackal vehicles prior to deployment to Afghanistan. It was in the light infantry role, though, that he excelled; his experience, determination and personality inspiring all those around him.

Private Gareth Bellingham deployed to Afghanistan in April 2011 as part of Combined Force Nahr-e-Saraj (North), commanded by the Danish Battle Group.

On the morning of 18 June 2011, Private Bellingham deployed with C Company Tactical Headquarters and Number 3 Tolay (Afghan National Army), to an area near Khar Nikar in the Upper Gereshk Valley, Helmand
Province. The Company Group was conducting patrol to assess the situation on the ground and meet with the local population who had recently returned to compounds in the area.

During the patrol, a local Afghan was injured by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). As C Company were providing security, insurgents fired upon the patrol and Private Bellingham was fatally wounded.

Private Bellingham will be sorely missed by his family, friends, and all that knew him.

Leslie and Suzanne, Gareth's proud parents, said:

"Gareth died doing the job he loved and we are all proud of the job he did. He will be sadly missed by family, friends and all those who knew him. Rest in peace"

Lieutenant Colonel Giles Woodhouse, Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) said:

"Private Bellingham's untimely death is a tragic loss to the Battalion. He was an extremely hardworking and committed Warrior who was wholly respected by his peers and chain of command alike. Team-spirited, and with great common sense and humour, he was a pillar of strength in C Company.

"Pte Bellingham was one of those soldiers that you had to have in yoursection; fearless, utterly

professional, a prankster and a loyal friend who never let you down; quite simply he was a force for good.

"Observing Private Bellingham, before deploying on a patrol, with his Afghan Army partners with whom he had developed a genuine affinity, I can understand why they fought so hard to save him when he was mortally wounded. That his death has affected our partners as deeply, as it has all the soldiers from the Battalion, is testament to the high esteem in which he was held. The world will be that little bit emptier now
without him. Our thoughts go out to his family at this devastating time."

Colonel Jens Riis-Vestergaard, Commanding Officer Combined Force Nahr-e-Saraj (North) said:

"Pte Bellingham was an exemplar of the counter-insurgent soldier that works in the Nahr-e-Saraj (North) area of operations. His conduct, professionalism, confidence and good nature helped reassure and protect a population in harm's way. The Afghan Army Tolay that he worked with thought so highly of him that several, in turn, refused to leave him when struck, considering him 'one of theirs' after just 2 months of fighting together. Typical

of his unit, fighting to keep others safe, he was an excellent soldier who will be desperately missed by all in Combined Force Nahr-e-Saraj (North)."

Major Alex McKay, Officer Commanding C Company 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) said:

"Private Bellingham died a Warrior. A tough, mature, and dedicated soldier, he was loved by C Company and deeply respected by the Afghan Tolay we partner. Having worked closely with the Afghan National Army
since our arrival in Afghanistan - mentoring, leading, and inspiring their soldiers - it should not be a surprise that, on the day that he died, he was at the tip of the C Company Group spear. One of the furthest forward of our soldiers, he had positioned himself to guard another group working to his rear when they and he were attacked; an act of selflessness typical of him.

"Private Bellingham's respect for others, professionalism, calmness under fire, and good humour despite the odds, were an example to us all. A soldier with huge potential, his performance in Afghanistan through a series of contacts with the enemy was exemplary. More impressive, though, was his willingness to bond with Afghan soldiers, and protect local nationals, despite the obvious and significant risk. We and his friends grieve for a man that will never be forgotten. The thoughts of all Soldiers and Officers in the Khar Nikar area of operations are with his family and friends at this most testing of times."

Captain Mathew Hickmott, 3rd Tolay 3rd Kandak Afghan National Army Advisor, 3rd Battalion

The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) said:

"It was a privilege to work with Private Bellingham for the few months that I did. He was a key character in his Section and could be relied upon to get anything done. He grumbled often, in the way that soldiers do, but was proud that he was the point man and wouldn't have had it any other way. 'Bell' was an instantly likeable character who will be sorely missed by all."

Warrant Officer Class 2 Dougie Thomson, Company Sergeant Major, C Company, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) said:

"Pte Bellingham was a true Warrior, my Warrior. He had strength in abundance, and the courage of a pride of lions. Bell was a practical joker who made everybody laugh. When the troops were low on morale, he brought a smile to their faces, especially mine. We will remember you forever in our thoughts, 'Youth'."

Colour Sergeant Mark Walker, 3rd Tolay, 3rd Kandak Afghan National Army Advisor, 4th Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Volunteers) said:

"As soon as I met Bell I felt as if I knew him. He wore his heart on his sleeve and could make friends in an empty room. Even though the Afghan National Army and Bell didn't speak the same language, they instantly liked him due to the sheer force of his personality. When he was injured they fought to save him just as hard as his British colleagues."

Lance Corporal Rob Davis, Section Commander, C Company, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) said:

"Bell, as we sometimes called him, was the morale within our Section. He was never afraid to tell anyone 'how it was' and was the life and soul of the party. He could go out on a weekend by himself and make friends along the way. His first words on a Monday morning were "now let me tell you about my weekend." He was always whinging, but in a way that always cracked us up. He was a top bloke and a good soldier."

Private Matt Southall, C Company, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) said:

"Bell loved to travel, and he loved to drive; the number of driving courses he did proves this. He loved being the lead man, but he loved moaning about it even more. He was a great soldier and a great friend."

Private Wayne Adams, C Company, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) said:

"Bell loved a laugh and he loved Stoke City. He'd go to a game whenever he could, and if he couldn't, he'd find a bar and support long distance. He was really close to his Dad, Les, and our thoughts go out to him at this time."

Private Michael Bradley, C Company, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) said:

"Bell loved a laugh and was always up for a good time.  He was a top bloke and I'll miss him."

All of 8 Platoon, C Company, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) said:

"A true character of the Platoon, you were never short of a word to say. A young man of true heart who cared greatly for all his friends around him. It brings a great pain to lose a good man like you Bell.  You have left a hole that will be hard to fill. We have lost more than a Warrior, but a good friend who brought morale to us all in many ways.  You influenced many of us in the Section and 8 Platoon.  When you were taken away from us you took a piece of us all. You leave us though, not with sadness but heart, determination and true courage.  Rest in peace Gareth, always remembered but never forgotten by the lads of 8 Platoon. Watch over us."