

PRIVATE RATU MANASA SILIBARAVI  
ROYAL LOGISTIC CORPS

23 PIONEER REGIMENT THE

Private Ratu Manasa Silibaravi deployed to Afghanistan on Operation HERRICK 16 on 11 March 2012 as a member of an Advanced Search Team in the Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Task Force. As an Advanced Searcher, Private Silibaravi and his team were responsible for the detection of Improvised Explosive Devices in areas deemed to be high risk.

On 18 April 2012 Private Silibaravi was deployed in support of 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh to the Nahr-e-Saraj district of Helmand province. His team had conducted a number of search operations to clear irrigation ditches and enhance the security of operating bases, as well as deploying to provide direct Counter Improvised Explosive Device support to patrolling troops. In doing this Private Silibaravi and his team not only ensured freedom of movement for International Security Assistance Forces and Afghan National Security Forces, but undoubtedly saved the lives of both Afghans and International personnel.

Private Silibaravi was 32 years old and was born in Fiji. He joined the British Army in 2002 and in 2003 he took up his post in 23 Pioneer Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps based in Bicester, Oxfordshire. During a relatively short, yet busy career in the Army, Private Silibaravi had served in Iraq in 2003 and Afghanistan in 2006 and 2009. He has served in 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC and the Support Battalion, Headquarters Allied Rapid Reaction Corps. He also completed public duties at Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace, St James's Palace and the Tower of London in 2008. His enthusiasm and intelligence made him an ideal member of an Advanced Search Team

A consummate sportsman he was a member of the Regimental Rugby Team and was a promising candidate for the Royal Logistic Corps Rugby Team. He was a fine runner and represented the Regiment at athletics.

A popular Pioneer, Private Silibaravi leaves behind his parents, Meli and Merewalesi, his brother, Saimoni, and sister, Mereoni who all live in Fiji.

Lieutenant Colonel Simon Bell, Commanding Officer Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Task Force said:

"The terrible loss of Private Silibaravi has come as a shock to all of us in the Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Task Force and I know that it will affect his parent unit, 23 Pioneer Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps in a similar manner. At this most difficult of times my thoughts and heartfelt condolences are with his family and all of his friends.

"A quiet, yet determined and popular soldier, Private Silibaravi was a professional and committed individual. Strong and fit, he had an excellent work ethic, throwing himself wholeheartedly at every challenge. The number of operational tours that he had successfully completed is testament to his dedication and professionalism.

"Quite new to the specialist role of an Advanced Searcher, Private Silibaravi was nonetheless showing significant potential and promise for the future. He had easily taken on the skills required to add value to a team employed in the finding of deadly Improvised Explosive Devices in order that they can be safely disposed of. In the harsh and demanding conditions faced here in Afghanistan, his quiet confidence and clear inner strength had a positive, calming effect on those around him.

"The Royal Logistic Corps, 23 Pioneer Regiment and the Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Task Force have lost a professional, reliable and popular soldier today. He will be sadly missed by the members of the Task Force, but never forgotten. His family and friends are in our thoughts and prayers at this time."

Lieutenant Colonel Dom Fletcher RLC Commanding Officer 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC said:

"Private Ratu Silibaravi was one of my most experienced soldiers. Steadfast, redoubtable and brave, this soldier was a Pioneer to his core. A man of strong belief and affable character, he was immensely popular in the Regiment and a highly valued member of his Search team. He took immense pride in his successful selection and completion of the Advanced Search Course and his subsequent deployment with the Counter IED and Search Task Force on Op HERRICK 16. Trained to detect a wide range of insurgent Improvised Explosive Devices, he was attached to 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh Battlegroup, serving as part of Combined Force Burma in the northern part of Nahr-e Saraj district.

"Private Ratu Silibaravi was a obvious choice when volunteers were required to train for the high risk role of Advanced Search in Afghanistan. With his broad operational experience, and his superb soldiering skills, he quickly established himself as an invaluable member of his section. Intelligent and thoughtful by nature, he was highly professional and always gave 100% to any task he was given. He died amongst his friends, on operations in a role that is vital to achieving progress in Afghanistan and highly regarded by all deployed UK forces.

"He joined the Army in 2002 and saw operational service in Iraq and Afghanistan; this was his third Op HERRICK tour of duty. He served with the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps as well as conducting public duties at Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace, St James's Palace and the Tower of London in 2008. He was a soldier with good promotion prospects. This man contributed a huge amount to Regimental life in 23 Pioneer Regiment. He was a strong individual who was an outstanding rugby player and a talented all round sportsman. Typical of his warm personality, he was also an excellent coach and mentor to his junior soldiers. His loss will be felt by all of us in our small Regimental family, but his memories will live on in all of us that had the pleasure

of knowing him. He was the embodiment of a selfless and brave soldier; he was in every sense a true Pioneer.

"He leaves behind his brother Saimoni and sister Mereoni. They are all in our thoughts and prayers at this most tragic time. "

Major Ben Hawkins, Officer Commanding Operations Squadron, Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Task Force said:

"Private Silibaravi, or 'Sili' as he was more commonly known, was a quiet, composed and determined individual. As a Pioneer he was relatively new to the world of Advanced Search but he grasped it with true Pioneer Spirit and became a master of his trade. His exceptional Search skill meant he was an invaluable asset to his team; his incredible strength set him out amongst his peers. Well respected by his team and exceptionally level-headed Sili was truly a delight to be around. As a man of few words, he knew how to make his presence felt with his actions speaking louder than his words.

"The loss of Private Silibaravi will be felt deeply by my Squadron here in Afghanistan, as well as within his Unit back in the UK. Our thoughts are with his family and friends."

Major Derren Battersby RLC, Officer Commanding Operations Squadron, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC said:

"Private Silibaravi was killed in action whilst deployed in a dangerous and unforgiving role. He was very much a 'soldier's soldier'. A cliché perhaps, but he was a dedicated stalwart of the Squadron and of his community. He possessed considerable presence and physical strength yet he was also a mentor and made considerable efforts in bringing on the younger soldiers in the Squadron.

"He devoted considerable time and effort to the Fijian community. He was instrumental in bringing together Fijian communities across the UK at the annual Fijian Community Church Service. This was an immense feat and one that he was fiercely proud of. A devoted Christian, he regularly attended Sunday Mass. He was also a keen and talented singer and was a member of the community choir. Private Silibaravi was highly respected by all he encountered in whatever endeavour.

"To lose one of our own in such circumstances is a tragic loss. Our condolences and thoughts are with his family in Fiji and friends in the UK. He will be deeply missed by all of us."

Captain Andy Shannon RLC, Squadron Second in Command, Operations Squadron, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC said::

"Private Manasa 'Silli' Silibaravi was an immensely popular member of the Squadron,

well known for his happy attitude and entertaining antics. Hugely professional, he would throw himself at any task, a true Pioneer in every respect. Passing the Search Course was a very proud moment for Private Silibaravi and he was fiercely loyal to his Team as well as the Regiment. A keen sportsman and extremely fit, it was rare to see Private Silibaravi without a rugby ball in his hand or competing in some form of athletics. The Regiment has lost one of its brightest and best. My heartfelt condolences go out to his family. He will always be remembered."

Lieutenant Lee Rickards, Troop Commander, Operations Squadron, Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Task Force said:

"Private Silibaravi was a strong minded, professional soldier, loyal to those he served with. He had a passion for rugby and showed great skill representing the Regiment in the Army Premiership. Private Silibaravi will be missed by all who met him. I am particularly proud to have served with him. My thoughts go out to his family and friends."

Lieutenant Damien Turner, Advanced Search Advisor, 23 Pioneer Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps said:

"I know only too well the hole Sili will leave in our ranks. A very modest soldier, his heart of gold was truly known to all. I never once saw him lose his patience and he almost always had a smile to share. Despite his gentle nature, Sili was one of the strongest soldiers I have had the pleasure to meet. Without a doubt, our Regiment is a lesser place without his reassuring presence. He represented the best of us, a Pioneer through and through."

Warrant Officer Class One Wayne Fuller RLC Regimental Sergeant Major 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC said:

"Pte 'Prince' Silibaravi was a vibrant and popular member of the Regiment. A proud Fijian he was fit and brave and threw himself into all aspects of his deployment. He was a valued Advanced Search Team member; a pleasure for our NCOs to command and with his experienced manner and ability to mentor junior Soldiers, he himself was on the cusp of promotion.

"Back in barracks he was a talented sportsman, representing the Regiment at both athletics and rugby. A committed Christian, Pte Silibaravi was a real character within our local Fijian, and wider, Bicester community. He possessed a strength of character that spread to all around him, coupled with his boundless energy. He was a stalwart of our Regiment, one of our very best Soldiers and a true pioneer.

"To lose one of our most talented Soldiers on operations is a tragic loss, he will be sorely missed and our small family Regiment and the wider Corps will grieve for him immensely. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends at this time."

WO2 (SSM) Kevin Prevett, Squadron Sergeant Major, Operations Squadron, Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Task Force said:

"Private Ratu Silibaravi or 'Sili' to the team was the 'Gentle Giant' who could be relied upon in any situation. Coupled with his commanding presence was a shadow of kindness and gentleness. Sili was a quiet soldier who continually showed a loud infectious smile to those around him. My memorable moment with Sili was when I asked him to aid in building a metal water storage container, he was using the palm of his hand to thump in metal rods. When I showed him the hammer to use, he simply said in his usual relaxed manner, 'Weak'. I and the rest of us that are left behind will never forget him."

WO2 Kwan Cheung RLC, Squadron Sergeant Major Operations Squadron, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC said:

"Pte Silibaravi was a hugely popular and dedicated member of the Regiment. He joined the Army in 2002 and brought with him all the very best that you would expect from a fine Fijian Warrior.

"Pte Silibaravi is the kind of soldier that NCOs and Officers love to command; hardworking, extremely fit and intelligent, he is one of the very best. Aside from being a pleasure to command he inspires the younger soldiers, always giving them the very best advice and delivering the type of leadership that only a senior Private can.

"Pte Silibaravi was a keen sportsman, an ever-present member of the Regimental Rugby team and with that was always keen to try his hand at any physical challenge. Pte Silibaravi had strong belief which gave him strength, something that he was always prepared to share.

"Pte Silibaravi it is an honour to have known you for your entire career. You will never be forgotten."

Lance Corporal Andrew 'Wildy' Wild, 23 Pioneer Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps said:

"Sili was a strong minded, hard faced and well respected member of the Pioneer family. He kept himself to himself, but when needed you knew he was present! He loved rugby and smashed up the opposition and the pitch in equal measure. He will sorely be missed."

Private Cayah 'Robbo' Ware-Roberts, 23 Pioneer Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps said:

"Sili was an immensely strong character, everyone liked him, it's as simple as that! He was always making fun for himself, either in the Squadron lines playing games, or as I remember, being unhealthily obsessed with conkers! He was a big softie, with a reassuringly calm nature. I consider it an absolute privilege and honour to

have served next to him. Strong as an ox, always smiling and a true friend, that's how I'll remember you Sili."

Lance Corporal Cabemaikadavu, 9 Troop, Operations Squadron, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC said:

"Pte Silibaravi was a character who everyone knew. He lived his life to the very limit. Immensely compassionate, he was always loyal to those around him. He was a keen sportsman who was extremely fit. He will be greatly missed when running the rugby field without him. His happy character, good laughs and funny stories will be sadly missed by the whole community.

"A Fijian born warrior, one of the finest and the best, who died as a true Pioneer. We'll miss you brother and we will always remember you."

Lance Corporal Kuruvakadua, Operations Support Squadron, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC said:

"'Isa Sili'... we could have a lifetime wish and one dream that could come true. We could pray to God with all our hearts just to see and speak to you again, but a thousand words won't bring you back. We know because we've tried and cried with a million tears. You've left behind broken hearts and precious memories throughout our military life. But we never wanted memories, we only wanted you.

"Thank you for everything that we've shared, being a dedicated, awesome and wonderful brother. Your kind smile, your God gifted voice, your never ending jokes and not forgetting your 'vakalutu vosa' style will be sorely missed.

"Isa RIP 'Taciqu'!

"Condolences and all our love are with your family. Your memories will forever be cherished by your brothers in arms here at 23 Pioneer Regiment and most of all, your Bicester Fijian Community."

Private Qalo, 10 Troop, Operations Squadron, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC said:

"Pte Silibaravi was well known amongst his friends for a caring and good hearted nature. I first met him during my Phase One Training in Pirbright, whilst he was accommodated there for a charity event he had helped to organise. I went to Afghanistan with him in 2006. He's the type that is always up to any challenge, who will give his all for anyone. A comedian and an entertainer, everyone knew him in the community. You will be deeply missed in our hearts and homes but never forgotten. I'll remember the happy times we shared and we'll look forward to when we meet again. The Pioneer Family never forgets."

Pte Ranatora, Operations Support Squadron, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC said:

"One day I asked myself 'What would the best person look like?' A few months later as I arrived into St David's Barracks, Bicester, I remembered that I came across the person that answered that question.

"I have known Pte Silibaravi for 7 years. I admire his dedication to any endeavour. 'Sili' was a very kind hearted and generous person. His life revolves around the people who need his help. He loves to help out a lot. A young junior soldier who does not fully understand how things work would always find 'Sili' guiding him. A lasting memory of 'Sili' is of us in Kenya last year, where he gave up his own rations to give to the children who always visited the camp for food and water. At all times I have found 'Sili' to be a very good leader and very responsible for his age. Whether in the block, on exercise, or on operations, 'Sili' led from the front, often doing the physical tasks himself that he could have left to others.

"Heavily involved in the Fijian community, everyone knew him and his Fijian brothers and family recognised the selfless commitment he made to us in Ambrosden and at the Church. He was a charming person; his sense of humour and light hearted nature will be remembered by all. His love of a joke and being the centre of entertainment at rugby or having a bowl of grog at the weekend will never leave us. I feel these attributes demonstrate someone with exceptional character who is born with that. It will not easily be forgotten by people who knew him.

"Naked came I out of my mothers womb and naked shall I return thither: The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of God.

"May your soul rest in peace. 'Moce mada mataquile Sili'."