

Bombardier Craig Hopson
40th Regiment Royal Artillery (The Lowland Gunners)

Bombardier Hopson was born on 11 March 1985 in Castleford, West Yorkshire and attended Castleford High Technology College before deciding that he wanted a career in the Army.

He joined 40th Regiment Royal Artillery (the Lowland Gunners) on 28 August 2002 after completion of his Basic Training at Pirbright and Phase 2 Training at Larkhill, Wiltshire.

After an initial tour in 129 (Dragon) Battery, he was posted to 38 (Seringapatam) Battery where as an Observation Post Assistant he very quickly established himself as a core member of the team.

Having previously completed operational tours in Iraq and Cyprus, he completed Pre-Deployment Training for Afghanistan and subsequently deployed to Kandahar in March 2009 as Second in Command of a Fire Support Team, attached, with his Battery, to The Black Watch, 3rd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Scotland.

Known to colleagues as 'Hoppo', Bombardier Hopson was a larger than life character and always at the centre of the action. Be it in the thick of the fight in Afghanistan on one of numerous Black Watch Operations, or back in barracks with his mates, his contribution was always characterised by good humour and the often painful honesty of a proud, steadfast Yorkshireman.

On operations, his role as Second in Command of a Fire Support Team was a vital and challenging one; the need to provide timely, accurate and overwhelming Artillery and Air Support to ISAF troops, balanced with the need to minimise collateral damage and civilian casualties can often be a difficult equilibrium to achieve.

In finding this balance, as in the technical and tactical aspects of his application of Gunnery, Bombardier Hopson excelled; he was truly in his element. A man of tremendous moral courage, he understood the consequences of his actions and the effect that they may have on the wider campaign and the people of Afghanistan, knowing that it often took more bravery to choose not to engage a target.

That he had the fortitude to apply this courageous inactivity under pressure and under fire was a mark of the man.

In addition to his considerable professional skill as a Joint Fires Controller, Bombardier Hopson was a talented sportsman, having represented the Army at Rugby League. He leaves behind his mother Lynn, partner Eleanor and their three month old daughter Amelia.

Lieutenant Colonel Owen Adams, Commanding Officer of 40th Regiment Royal Artillery said:

"Bombardier Hopson was part of the fabric of my Regiment, known to everyone as a man with an enormous personality and a huge heart. He had that rare quality of being able to inject his own brand of gruff Northern humour into any situation, always at ear splitting volume, generally at the expense of his superiors in the Regiment, but always in good spirit.

"A talented sportsman, he gave no quarter on the rugby field and expected none in return and this characterised his approach to life and conduct of operations in Afghanistan, yet, for all his tenacity and uncompromising nature, he displayed a humility and compassion that only served to endear him further to those who were privileged to know him.

"The quality of a man's life cannot be measured in days or years, but by the memories left when they are gone. Those touched by the life of Bombardier Hopson are left with the anguish of his loss but are consoled by their memories of him."

"Our thoughts and prayers are with his mother Lynn, partner Eleanor and daughter Amelia at this unimaginably distressing time."

Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Cartwright, Commanding Officer, The Black Watch, 3 SCOTS Battle Group, said:

"Bombardier Craig Hopson had made a huge impact in the Battle Group for the year we have all known him. He was a big man in every sense: a huge character, great fun and professionally immensely talented.

"He was with us in Kenya on exercise, across England and Wales during our operational training and of course here in Afghanistan. A booming English voice amidst the Scots majority, he gave and received banter in abundance and he contributed enormously to the team spirit required in a Battle Group on operations.

"He died at the very front line of Operation Panther's Claw in Babaji, as the most forward artillery observer in the entire Brigade. He was part of a patrol looking for a polling centre for the Afghanistan Presidential Elections next month. He has given his life for his friends, for the Battle Group and his Regiment, and for the people of Afghanistan so that they may have a better life.

"'Hoppo' was so proud of his new born daughter and we cannot begin to imagine the hole that has been left in Eleanor's and Amelia's lives. Amelia will never know her father; our lives have been made richer by him in every way and I hope they can take some comfort from our thoughts and prayers at this most tragic time."

Major Jeremy Sharpe, Battery Commander 38 (Serlingapatam) Battery RA, said:

"Bombardier Craig Hopson was the first member of the Battery that I met. A vibrant individual with a sense of humour and heart to match his stature, he made an immediate impact as he did on everyone who was fortunate enough to come into contact with him.

"Craig had a ready smile and was the first to start with friendly banter in any situation; his irreverent sense of humour was legendary. He attacked everything in life with verve and determination, whether at work, on the rugby field or in the bar. 'Hoppo' enjoyed hiding his light under a bushel, his brash exterior thinly covering a man of intelligence, courage and compassion; he was the consummate professional.

"Immensely strong, calm under fire and technically excellent, his team remember him as a man they looked up to and aspired to emulate. My abiding memory of him at work will be him controlling simultaneous missions while under fire without resort to cribs or notes.

"He was a man in his element doing the job he loved; he earned the deep respect and friendship of everyone in the Battery and the Battle Group. His booming voice across the battlefield will be missed by one and all.

"Craig had just returned from R&R seeing his baby daughter Amelia for only the second time and his enormous pride in becoming a father shone through whenever he spoke of his family. Our thoughts and prayers are with them at this terrible time.

"Craig's loss leaves a hole in the Battery that will be difficult to fill. If he were here he would be the first to crack a joke, remind us of the task in hand and, in his own inimitable style draw the team together and back to work. That is exactly what we will do; he would expect nothing less than this of us.

"Bombardier Hopson died as he lived, going forwards, determined and committed. He was one of the best of us and we will carry on strengthened by his memory. He will not be forgotten."

Major Matt Munro, Officer Commanding Alpha (Grenadier) Company, said:

"Craig Hopson will be remembered by Alpha (Grenadier) Company as a remarkable soldier and a charismatic and hugely popular young man. He personally made a massive contribution to our operations in Afghanistan and was a pivotal member of my team.

"We joked often that Craig's personal 'volume control' was defective but, truth be told, we loved listening to his irreverent sense of humour and razor sharp wit. Craig loved to proudly advertise his West Yorkshire roots and surrounded by Jocks, this always made for entertaining banter.

"Craig's bluff exterior belied a deeply caring side; on the many occasions when he spoke of his newborn daughter Amelia he visibly swelled with pride. At this terrible time our thoughts are with his partner Eleanor, his family and many, many friends. His absence leaves a great void; gone but never forgotten, Craig Hopson - Rest In Peace."

Captain James Banks, FST Commander, said:

"Hoppo was a larger than life character both in stature and personality; he carried a mature head on young shoulders and persona that none could match. From the first moment I met Bombardier Hopson I could see he was a character. His bubbly and individual style of soldiering

made him an excellent and irreplaceable member of my Fire Support Team.

"Hoppos technical ability was second to none and his passion for gunnery was clear to all that knew him. As my second in command he was a solid sounding block and on more than one occasion saved my blushes when the technical aspects of Gunnery had caught me off guard.

"He had a wicked sense of humour and was more than capable of making fun of the most extraordinary situations. He was an excellent Bombardier, a pleasure to command and a good friend. Bombardier Hopson will be sorely missed throughout not only the Battery but throughout the whole of the Royal Regiment of Artillery. Bombardier Hopson I salute you."

Sergeant Nick Collins, Battery Commander's Assistant, 38 Battery said:

"Craig will be remembered firstly as a proud father, a fine and brave soldier and above all a friend. Always ready with a joke and willing to help those in need of guidance, usually with a kind word but when required a firm hand.

"He always led from the front, either in battle or on a rugby pitch where for his strapping six foot frame he showed surprising nimbleness. He also proved his knowledge in the classroom where he achieved high grades in all his courses.

"I've known Craig since he joined the Regiment, serving with him on operational tours and as he progressed through the ranks watching him mature into the role he excelled at. As a professional soldier he had a great future ahead of him and I am proud to have served with him but I am prouder to know he called me a friend.

"As part of the family that is 38 Battery and his former unit 129 Bty, he will be sorely missed by all who knew him both past and present. At this time our thoughts are with Eleanor, Amelia and his family."

Friends – Lance Bombardier Willie Ewens and Gunner Danny Venter said:

"Hoppos was a larger than life character who always loved a good laugh. He spoke his mind and in the time we worked together was a good ack and an excellent friend.

"He always backed us up in any situation and we will miss his dry sense of humour. He will never be forgotten. Our thoughts are with his family, his partner Eleanor and his young daughter Amelia."