

 Warrant Officer Class 2 (Company Sergeant Major) Colin Beckett deployed to Afghanistan on 15 October 2010 as Company Sergeant Major C Company, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment (3 PARA). He was based at Patrol Base FOLAD in the Nad-e Ali District of Helmand Province. On the morning of 5 February 2011, he was deployed on an operation to interdict the movement of insurgents into Shaheed, a village on the Nahr-e-Bughra canal where C Company have been developing a protected community. At 0834 Company Sergeant Major Beckett was fatally wounded by an Improvised Explosive Device which detonated as he was moving into position to cover his fellow patrol members. Company Sergeant Major Beckett, known as 'Tom' in the Army, was born on 20 February 1974 in his home town of Peterborough. He joined the Army in July 1990 and was posted to 3 PARA on completion of his training. A strong performance on the Anti-Tank Cadre in 1993 saw him take the first steps down a specialisation in which he would become a master, leading Anti-Tank soldiers at nearly every rank. Company Sergeant Major Beckett's outstanding command ability was recognised early and he moved up the ranks swiftly, excelling on Anti-Tank and rifle command courses as he went, all fitted around operational deployments to Northern Ireland and Kosovo. It was as an Anti-Tank Section Commander that he deployed to Iraq during the first Operation TELIC in 2003 but he had been promoted by the time he deployed as a Platoon Sergeant with C Company on Operation HERRICK 4, 3 PARA's first deployment to Helmand in 2006. He was soon back in Afghanistan on Operation HERRICK 8, again at the forefront commanding his soldiers, this time as a Fire Support Group Second In Command during 3 PARA's tour as Regional Battle Group South. After promotion to Warrant Officer Class 2 in 2009, Company Sergeant Major Beckett took over as Company Sergeant Major C Company in the vital lead-up to operations. It was in this most challenging role that he deployed to Afghanistan in October 2010 as part of 3 PARA Battlegroup, Combined Force Nad-E-Ali (North). An inspirational and iconic leader with a staggering amount of operational experience, Company Sergeant Major Beckett was known and respected across the Parachute Regiment. In a career that spanned two decades, he spent only a handful of months away from the Battalion in which he was a central figure, one of the Non-Commissioned Officers that make up its unyielding core. In C Company, his company, and within the Anti-Tank specialisation his contribution of over 20 years of service is the stuff of legend and he will be profoundly missed. He leaves behind his parents Del and Kim and his wife Rachel who is expecting their first child mid-February 2011. Mrs Rachel Beckett, said: "Anyone whoever met or knew Colin 'Tom' would have been touched by him in a big way and he will never be forgotten. He was a fantastic soldier, a great son, a good brother and friend and a truly special husband. My bestest friend, my soul mate, my absolute world. We love him and shall miss him so very much. May his love for life, strength, humour and strong character, live on forever in his baby girl Freya." Lieutenant Colonel James Coates, Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, said: "Warrant Officer Class 2 Colin Beckett was one of the most talented Sergeant Majors of his generation. With a long and distinguished career spanning countless deployments and three tours in Afghanistan, he represented the very essence of a Paratrooper; professional to the core, devoted to his men and hugely respected." Warrant Officer Class 2

Beckett died following an explosion on 5 February 2011 during a patrol near the town of Shaheed in Nad-e Ali District, central Helmand. Under his close mentorship, in the weeks preceding his death, C Company 3 PARA had secured a huge swathe of Nad-e Ali District in a series of bold and decisive operations which already hold a legendary place in 3 PARA's history. More recently his Company had been operating from a patrol base in Shaheed, aiming to deliver improved security and development to the area in the face of a significant threat from insurgent activity. On the morning of 5 February, characteristically, he was deployed on patrol with his soldiers, seeking to disrupt this threat, when tragedy struck.

Warrant Officer Class 2 Beckett will be remembered for many reasons. Those who worked with him saw a man with humility and a natural aptitude that set him apart. He dealt superbly with his soldiers and was immensely popular with everyone he met. His sense of humour was second to none; I will never forget how he captivated the entire Sergeants' Mess during the last Summer Ball. He was a family man and a true gentleman. But most of all, to us, he will be remembered as a fellow Paratrooper and trusted friend who unconditionally gave his all in life. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife Rachel, who is expecting their first child, and his wider family. We pledge now to keep his memory alive through our continuing actions throughout this tour and beyond. His legacy will be the example he set to us all and the decisive role he played in bringing lasting security to 3 PARA's area of operations in Helmand.

Utrinqe Paratus.

Warrant Officer Class 1 (Regimental Sergeant Major) Richard Hames, Regimental Sergeant Major, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, said:

Warrant Officer Class 2 Tom Beckett is 'The' Company Sergeant Major. He drove his company forward continually whilst deployed on the ground. He was the Dad to the young toms, Uncle to the young officers, a Brother to his Platoon Sergeants, best friend to the OC and an utterly professional Paratrooper who I will dearly miss. The commitment he gave to every one of his Paratroopers in the Company was second to none. He oozed professionalism, gave sound advice, and was level headed in the heat of battle.

Not only have I lost a friend but the Warrant Officers' & Sergeants' Mess of 3 PARA has lost a warm hearted and dynamic character who would always bring his great humour and an infectious smile to any Mess member who was sitting lonely gazing into a beer. The Battalion has lost an icon of a soldier; looked up to by so many, respected by his peers and the chain of command. A CSM who always worked for his Paratroopers, he will be dearly missed by all. A true Airborne brother.

Tom, thoughts and prayers from all of 3 PARA are now with your wife Rachel, and your parents Del & Kim.

Major Ollie Kingsbury, Officer Commanding C Company, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, said:

Warrant Officer Class 2 Tom Beckett died as he had spent the whole tour: watching my back, taking a fire position to prevent anything getting at the company HQ. I had only known him for about 2 years, but he was a great mate as well as my right hand man. He kept my feet on the ground for some of our wilder plans, but he never let us rest on our laurels. He was as bright as any soldier I have met, and he could adapt his natural warrior instincts to the subtler requirements of Afghanistan. When something really needed doing, however, it was hard to stay in front of him. He could have used his job to stay comfortably in camp, but on every company patrol he was the first to get his kit on. He was a constant example of how to operate in some very uncomfortable situations. In a fight in Helmand, or in the Mess he was the same: cheerful but level headed, full of banter but with a core of steel. His credibility as a soldier was second to none.

He has left a gap in the Company that simply will not be filled, but our grief and loss can not come close to that of his family. His wife is expecting

their first baby in less than 2 weeks, when he was due to be on R&R.<br /><br />"God bless you, Tom. ♦ We'll have a pint for you."<br /><br />Captain Ed Withey, Company Second in Command C Company, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, said:<br /><br />"Warrant Officer Class 2 'Tom' Beckett is a great example of what a truly professional Paratrooper should be; he was tough and dedicated, ♦ but also had a level of understanding and compassion towards his men that is rare to find. ♦ As a Company Sergeant Major, Warrant Officer ♦ Class 2 Beckett offered me invaluable support and advice along with a professional friendship that I look back on with fond memories. ♦ Warrant ♦ Officer Class 2 Beckett had a sense of humour that would brighten up even the most stressful of situations, never letting any event get the ♦ better of him.<br /><br />"The loss of a Company Sergeant Major will always be hard for a Company, but I believe that the memories and legacy of such a fine individual ♦ will strengthen its resolve for the remaining months of the tour. ♦ I know that Warrant Officer Class 2 Beckett died doing exactly what he ♦ loved; leading by example and taking the fight to the enemy. ♦ His actions have been an inspiration to the men who have worked alongside ♦ him over the past months. ♦ His presence in C Company will be sorely missed."<br /><br />Lieutenant Ben Neary, 7 Platoon Commander, C Company, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, said:<br /><br />"Company Sergeant Major Beckett had the very best qualities of a Parachute Regiment soldier. ♦ He was firm yet fair and passionate about ♦ looking after the Company. ♦ His unique laugh could be heard a mile off. I will always be thankful for the all the advice he passed onto me. ♦ His ♦ death will have a lasting impact on us all. ♦ Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this difficult time."<br /><br />Lieutenant Ben Sebley, 8 Platoon Commander, C Company, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, said:<br /><br />"Warrant Officer Class 2 Beckett - a true Paratrooper. May you rest in peace."<br /><br />Lieutenant James Higginson, 9 Platoon Commander, C Company, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, said:<br /><br />"Company Sergeant Major Beckett's death has been felt by everyone in C Company. ♦ He was a huge character who knew and understood every one of ♦ the blokes. ♦ I will remember him by his jokes and his comical evil laugh, and mostly by his generosity in the time he gave to the young ♦ officers. ♦ He made up the fabric and spirit of C Company - his company - and he will be missed by all of us."<br /><br />Warrant Officer (Class 2) Matt Lawson, Regimental Signals Warrant Officer 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, said:<br /><br />"My friend Tom. ♦ Tom was a pivotal member of the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess, his approach and manner in all aspects relating to his ♦ work was done with the utmost professionalism, and as such were well respected. ♦ He was a man of considerable moral courage, never afraid to ♦ make an unpopular decision to get the job done. ♦ I saw Tom as what I would call a "People Person", someone with whom you felt at ease talking ♦ to and able to confide in; always taking the time to listen regardless of the personal and professional issues he was experiencing at the time. Tom was the ultimate professional, a paratrooper, someone who, in truth, I looked up to in most respects. ♦ His attitude and approach were unrelenting, an example to us all.<br /><br />"Tom, God bless, I will never forget you. We are left with a void that will be difficult to fill; until we meet again mate. ♦ Your friend."<br /><br />Colour Sergeant Glenn Hobbs, Company Quartermaster Sergeant C Company 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, said:<br /><br />"Tom, over the past year you have taught me how to be a Company Sergeant Major. ♦ It's been a true pleasure over all these years. ♦ Your humour and ♦ manner will be missed by me greatly. ♦ My thoughts are with your family.<br /><br />"Rest in peace friend."<br /><br />Colour Sergeant Michael Taylor, Anti-Tank Platoon, Fire Support Commander attached to C Company, 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment ♦ said:<br /><br />"Company Sergeant Major Colin (Tom) Beckett - A

career-long friend, we will miss you.<br /><br />"Rest in peace Tom."<br /><br />Corporal Rupert Reynolds, Joint Terminal Attack Controller attached to C Company, 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, said:<br /><br />"Tom, from Platoon Sgt to Company Sergeant♦ Major, a good few years.♦ I never did get you back for hot spoonings.<br /><br />"Rest in peace mate."<br /><br />Private James Stark, 9 Platoon, C Company, 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, said:<br /><br />"A truly inspirational sergeant major, who certainly inspired me to be a good paratrooper.♦ Also good on 'The Bear!'"<br /><br />The private soldiers of C Company, 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, said:<br /><br />"He was everything a Company Sergeant Major should be: firm, fair, funny and professional every second he was awake.♦ He was as proud to be a♦paratrooper as anyone could be. He has respect from his men that will never be lost in the Parachute Regiment.<br /><br />"He will always be with us."</p> <p>♦</p>