

Lieutenant John Charles Sanderson of 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire) [1 MERCIAN], attached to 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles Battle Group, died on Wednesday 11 August 2010 of wounds sustained in Afghanistan.

Lt Sanderson was wounded in an explosion whilst on patrol in the Nahr-e Saraj district of Helmand province on 13 July 2010.

He was treated at the scene before being flown to the UK for further treatment. On Wednesday 11 August 2010, surrounded by his family, he finally succumbed to his injuries.

Lt Sanderson was born in Oklahoma USA on 23 April 1981. He was educated at Bradfield College and Exeter University where he read history and was a member of the University Officer Training Corps.

Immediately after university he joined the Royal Marines and began training on the Young Officers' Course at Lympstone in September 2002, although he was forced to withdraw from the course having broken his ankle. Following this he had a brief foray into the world of finance before attending the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, commissioning into the Mercian Regiment in April 2009.

Following the Platoon Commanders' Battle Course he joined the 1st Battalion in time to assume command of 1 Platoon, A Company, and deploy to Kenya to take part in Exercise Grand Prix.

He successfully led his platoon through pre-deployment training and, shortly before deploying to Afghanistan, moved them to the newly re-formed B (Malta) Company in readiness for its deployment with the 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles Battlegroup on Operation HERRICK 12.

The Company deployed to Patrol Base 1 in the Nahr-e Saraj (South) District of Helmand province.

B (Malta) Company have spent the last four months improving the quality of the lives of hundreds of local Afghans around the villages of Enezai and Char Coucha in the Nahr-e Saraj District of Helmand by providing much needed security and reassurance to the community in the area.

On 13 July 2010, during an operation to the north east of Char Coucha, close to Patrol Base 1, Lt Sanderson's 12-man multiple was occupying a compound in order to provide security for an IED clearance operation to take place. At 0626hrs local time, an explosion occurred, injuring Lt Sanderson.

Lt Sanderson leaves behind his mother, father and sister, all of whom live in Windelsham, Surrey.

His family have paid the following tribute:

"We have lost a brilliant and loving son and brother. John loved his Army career and was enthusiastically committed to his men and particularly his and their role in Afghanistan.

"He believed he was contributing to a better life for the Afghan people. We will miss him tremendously but we will never forget him and what he gave to us."

Lieutenant Colonel Andy Hadfield, Commanding Officer, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Lieutenant John Sanderson joined the Battalion in April of 2009, and after completing his Platoon Commander's Battle Course arrived just in time to take his Platoon to Kenya. It was here that I really started to get to know him.

"Big-hearted, strong and imaginative, he quickly caught my eye as one to watch for the future. Whilst acting as 'enemy' he managed to evade us all and infiltrate the battlegroup headquarters, much to our dismay and his mens' amusement.

"John was forthright, had an opinion on most things, and was always optimistic. He offered solutions to problems, and was full of ideas for future events, well thought out and passionately delivered.

"He cared deeply for his men, and this was obvious from the outset; they responded brilliantly to his loyalty and leadership. In the Officers' Mess he will be remembered, amongst other things, for his dinner speech on the importance of Mercian Warriors sharing beer before standing in the shield wall to defend their kingdom.

"He was extremely keen to deploy to Afghanistan to work to improve the lives of the ordinary Afghan people and he relished the challenge of service in this, so very dangerous, country. He rose to it magnificently, with courage, fortitude, tenacity and compassion.

"He was loved and respected by all, bound by the values of the Mercian Brotherhood and his innate common decency.

"He stood firm at the head of his men, and struck hard at their enemies.

"Above all I will remember him as a courageous, honest and caring man who was probably destined to sit in the Commanding Officer's chair one day.

"A huge character, John Sanderson will never be forgotten. Our thoughts are with his mother, his father and his sister at this most difficult time."

Lt Col Gerald Strickland MBE, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles Battlegroup, said:

"Lieutenant John Sanderson was a big man with a heart of gold, and it was with deep, deep sadness that we learned that he had finally succumbed to injuries sustained in an explosion when he was on patrol.

"I will always remember him as a young officer in his prime, totally at one with his soldiers with whom he had a wonderful relationship. He was their boss and their friend.

"Tough and brave in battle, he had led his platoon through hard times, but always remained cheerful and positive.

"All of us in the Royal Gurkha Rifles Battlegroup are united in our thoughts for his family who have suffered so much with such dignity over these last few weeks. We mourn John's loss and share a small part of their burden of grief."

Major Rich Grover, Officer Commanding B (Malta) Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Lieutenant John Sanderson came to B (Malta) Company with 1 Platoon at the start of the tour, having come across from A Company. Although he was relatively new to the Battalion he had made a reputation for himself as an excellent platoon commander and was highly regarded by all.

"I was immediately struck by his infectious enthusiasm for everything he did.

"A truly inspirational leader, his men would follow him anywhere and for anything. A leader who inspired his men by always being at the front, he was courageous, loyal and determined. He had already proved this on numerous occasions on operations.

"He cared passionately for the men of his platoon, and they loved and respected him for it. Confident and self-assured, he was always motivated to be better and never stopped in this pursuit. He would always ask questions and he was held in high regard by his platoon sergeant and junior non-commissioned officers for this.

"John was committed to making our area of operations better. He really cared about what we were doing and the positive effect he could have on the local population. He wanted to help in any way he could and leave it a better place.

"He would regularly hold meetings with the local population when on patrol in order to get to the root of any problems that we could assist with, and it was his empathy and attitude with the locals that helped build a positive relationship.

"Born to be an infantry platoon commander, he found his calling.

"A man whose glass was always half-full, never empty, he will be remembered as a kind hearted and gregarious person, always with a smile on his face.

"His strength and fortitude has been exemplified by the way in which he tried to fight his injuries. He will be missed by all in B (Malta) Company but his spirit, enthusiasm and will to succeed will live on in us all. Stand firm brother, we will miss you dearly."

Maj Mark Ellwood MBE, Officer Commanding A Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Lieutenant John Sanderson was as determined and committed as he was able and professional. A Platoon Commander of the rarest quality, who gave his all before we had the chance to see his full and undoubted potential unfold.

"John was the very epitome of what we all aspire to be; a natural leader possessed of boundless energy and enthusiasm with a deep respect and adoration of the men he had the privilege to command.

"On completion of his officer training, John took command of 1 Platoon, A Company as they prepared to deploy on exercise in Kenya. A challenging test for any young officer but he shone in all that he did, moulding his platoon with great care and professionalism in preparation for our operational deployment to Afghanistan.

"His diligence and devotion to his men set him apart; he led and they willingly followed. His platoon became his very reflection; skilled, adaptable and ready for anything that was required of them.

"Always polite, respectful and unquestionably loyal, I am privileged to have had the honour to work with him and to have a man of his calibre command one of my platoons. It was thus a great personal disappointment that he and his platoon were detached from A Company immediately prior to deployment.

"True to his incredible strength of character, he took the move to B (Malta) Company in his stride and made it his own. He believed passionately in the difficult work that he was doing to protect the people of Helmand. In doing so, and in helping to keep our country safe, we owe him and his family an enormous debt of gratitude.

"I, and all of A Company, valued him immensely and are now the poorer for his loss, but I take comfort in knowing that he died leading his men from the front, doing the very job he so passionately loved.

"I have no doubt that he would wish us to continue our work here in Afghanistan unabated; we will honour him by so doing.

"We have had a genuine star taken from us. We mourn his loss but those whose grief is far greater than ours, his sister and his parents, will take some comfort in knowing that his ever glorious memory will stand firm and strike hard in our hearts forever."

Maj Nick Brown, Adjutant, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"A nicer man you could not hope to meet. John Sanderson exuded professionalism, charm, enthusiasm and a deep compassion for his men. He was liked and respected in the Battalion from top to bottom for his outstanding ability, leadership and humour; he was certainly a star of the future.

"As Adjutant I utilised his qualities as an example to prospective officers and hopeful officer cadets – he was everything you could hope for in a young infantry officer.

"A warrior in battle and a gentleman, he will be sorely missed but never forgotten by all who knew him and my thoughts and prayers go out to his family at this tragic time."

Captain Adrian Thompson, Operations Officer, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"In the short space of time that Lieutenant John 'Sandman' Sanderson served with the 1st Battalion he has left a lasting impression, one that will never be forgotten.

"Enthusiastic with seemingly limitless energy and strength, and a willingness to learn, John epitomised everything that a young infantry officer could ever aspire to be, and that very few manage to achieve.

"He performed his duties as a platoon commander with such professionalism, coupled with passion and determination - I was full of admiration for the way he tackled the pre-Afghanistan training, never afraid to seek advice when necessary, but ultimately doing it his way and doing it well.

"He always strived to ensure the very best for his soldiers, either in training or with their welfare in mind, and it came as no surprise to anyone that he was so adored by his soldiers and brother officers alike.

"You knew that a night out with John was never going to be short of entertainment and high jinx, but that he would be firing on all cylinders in the morning, unlike the rest of us!

"His loss will be keenly felt by everyone in the Battalion, but this pales in comparison to the grief

and heartache his family are going through, and my deepest sympathies are with them at this very difficult time.

"A new star shines brightly in the sky tonight, and we can take comfort that John will be forever watching over us. Rest in Peace Mercian Warrior."

Captain Grant Brown, Officer Commanding Reconnaissance Platoon, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"If ever I knew a warrior-poet, it was John. The way he looked at life, and the situations that one could find oneself in, was unlike any other I have encountered.

"He firmly believed that he could make a difference and was always voicing ideas on how to help the local people. This is what set John apart from the rest of us.

"His compassion for the people of this land was only outdone by his commitment and concern for the men under his command.

"He was loved and respected because he showed love and respect. A more popular and enthusiastic Platoon Commander you will not find and his death has left a huge space which cannot be filled. The Mercian Regiment is poorer for his departure and those that knew him have been left devastated.

"From a personal point of view, I have lost a great friend. From quiet coffees whilst discussing 'El Cid', to words of wisdom when I have been low, I will miss them all. My thoughts and prayers are with his family, as they have been throughout their ordeal.

"John, you were an utterly professional officer and it was a privilege to serve alongside you. More importantly, you were a genuine guy with too many good traits to mention. You were my colleague and friend and I will miss you. May you Rest in Peace."

Capt Ben Powell, Mortar Platoon Commander, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"John, if everyone had your positive attitude, desire to learn and enthusiasm for life the world would truly be a better place. You leaving us has left a hole in the Officers' Mess and a hole amongst the soldiers you have served alongside that will never be replaced. Rest in Peace my friend."

Capt James Baker, Second in Command of A Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"John was a remarkable guy to work with. He had endless energy and an infectious enthusiasm for everything which was exhausting to keep up with.

"Utterly selfless and devoted to his platoon, they loved him for it, and they followed him everywhere; in Kenya, throughout pre-deployment training and then on operations here in Afghanistan.

"He quickly made his mark within the Company through his professionalism and diligence and formed a very tight team with the other platoon commanders, resulting in numerous comedy escapades.

"A big guy with an even bigger character, he will leave a massive gap in the Company, and in the Officers' Mess, and will be sorely missed."

Captain Phil Dyson, B (Malta) Company Second-in-Command, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire), said:

"Words are always inadequate at times like this but it is all we have to express how we felt about John.

"He was one of the best men I knew. He cared about everyone and lifted the spirits of all those around him, no matter the rank. His men loved him and trusted him and I do not think a man can gain many higher accolades in this world. He died doing the job he loved and he never gave less than his all.

"He leaves a gap in B (Malta) Company that will very difficult to fill and we will all miss him. Rest in Peace mate and we will see you later on."

Lt Richard Sawyer, Officer Commanding 9 Platoon, C Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"John Sanderson was a good friend who was liked and respected by all ranks. He had an infectious enthusiasm for everything he did and a genuine zest for life.

"Despite being on the receiving end of continuous mess banter, he showed a great sense of humour and was omnipresent when there was fun to be had. He was a highly capable and ambitious junior officer who will be sorely missed.

"Rest in Peace Mercian brother."

Lt Neil Cooke, Officer Commanding 4 Platoon, A Company, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire), said:

"Lieutenant John Sanderson, known as 'The Sandman' in the Officers' Mess, joined A Company during Exercise Grand Prix in Kenya last September and instantly made a name for himself as not only a gifted platoon commander, but also a thoroughly likeable man.

"His eternal optimism shone through in all he did and he never accepted that something could not be done.

"He often worked long into the night to ensure his platoon was correctly managed, tirelessly putting his men's welfare and careers before himself.

"Through his selfless hard work it would be no exaggeration to say his men followed him, not

because they had to, but because they wanted to.

"He saw the funny side of life no matter how difficult the circumstances - the eternal optimist if ever there was one.

"He was a character within the Mess, and we all miss his pranks and hearty chuckle.

"An inspirational leader, comrade in arms, but more importantly a close friend has been taken before his time.

"Sleep well buddy, your rest is well earned."

Lt James Sugden, Platoon Commander, A Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"I have had the absolute honour and pleasure of knowing John since he first joined A Company last July. I also have the privilege of calling him my friend.

"John was an example to us all. He was a bastion of integrity, diligence, honour, selfless commitment, bravery and kindness. John has made a great impression on all who knew him. His untimely death has deeply affected us all and my thoughts and prayers are with his family.

"John and I had many good times together and it is these fond memories that I will forever carry with me.

"There was the time he locked himself out of the accommodation in Edinburgh Castle whilst sleep walking or the dance off we had at the Christmas Ball; there are simply too many to recount.

"You were a true soldier John and an amazing friend. You were always there for me. I will always remember our parting words before the tour and my only regret is that I wasn't serving alongside you. I know now you'll be watching over us all. I loved you like a brother, Rest in Peace my friend, I miss you so much."

Lt Sarah Greenwood, AGC Detachment Commander, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Sandman was one of the best of men. He was a great friend to all those who were lucky enough to know him and he was loved by many.

"One of my earliest memories of John was when he arrived in Battalion before going on his Platoon Commanders' Battle Course. The Mess had gone out for the night to Darlington, and John was dancing away, he then decided to carry different Mess members on his shoulders while still 'cutting shapes'. That was the type of man he was; strong as an ox, and never afraid of making a fool of himself.

"He was always there with his wonderful smile and a chuckle. He would stop whatever he was doing to help out a friend or just listen after a bad day. His soldiers were his priority though, and

he worked hard for them always. The influence he had on them, albeit for too short a time, will show through in them always.

"He was a great, all-round officer and had a great career ahead of him. The Army has lost a wonderful young officer.

"John, you have more than earned your place in Valhalla; may you finally find peace there. You will be ever glorious in our memories and I am grateful for having known you. My thoughts and prayers are with [your family] and all those who love you."

Warrant Officer Class 2 (WO2) Matthew Henry, A Company Sergeant Major, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Lieutenant John Sanderson was a role model officer, young, full of life and energy, caring and passionate about his job and his men. He was utterly dedicated and a true professional; a joy to work with.

"In such a relatively short period of time he made such an impact on all of us. He was a massive character and hugely popular amongst the ranks. I will miss the daily exchange of banter between young officer and Company Sergeant Major.

"Sir, it was such a privilege to have known and worked with you. You will be missed but I will always remember you with such fond memories. My thoughts are with you and your family. Stand Firm and Strike Hard."

WO2 Anthony Higginbottom, B (Malta) Company Sergeant Major, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Lieutenant John Sanderson - I knew of him within the Battalion but then when B (Malta) Company formed I had the privilege to work alongside him.

"He was a gentle giant who truly believed in the re-stabilisation of Afghanistan.

"He was a proud Platoon Commander who would go out of his way to ensure all the soldiers under his command had the correct equipment and support available to them.

"Whilst being in Patrol Base 1 he was nicknamed 'Lieutenant Fluffy' as no matter how negative the local nationals were, he would always see the best in people.

"I fully believe that Lieutenant Sanderson would have progressed through the officer ranks and fulfilled all of his leadership potential.

"He will be sorely missed by the members of B (Malta) Company and his beloved 1 Platoon. A professional and courageous Platoon Commander that I hope all the young and newly appointed commanders aspire to be like.

"Lieutenant Sanderson, you will always be known within the Mercian Regiment and live on in our memory, Sir, sleep well."

Colour Sergeant David Davies, 1 Platoon Sergeant, B (Malta) Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Lieutenant John Sanderson showed me the man he was from the first day that we met. He was an outstanding platoon commander and always put his men before himself, he inspired confidence in them in the face of adversity.

"He was a true gentleman who left a mark on everyone he met. He could instantly make people warm to him with his welcoming personality.

"He was a deeply compassionate man with an unquestionable respect and loyalty for his soldiers; he certainly made my life easier and helped me when I needed someone to talk to.

"So now I try to accept that my friend and my platoon commander has been taken away. This will be a huge challenge, but I know that the precious memories I have will somehow make this easier.

"My thoughts are with your family, you are a true soldier and I am privileged to have called you Boss."

Corporal Simon Done, Section Commander, 3 Platoon, A Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Our 'Boss', Lieutenant John Sanderson, was a young platoon commander who quickly took to life in A Company. He picked up the banter from the junior ranks and gave as good as he got, immediately bonding him with the blokes.

"A monster of a man, but with the biggest heart, a real friendly giant. I had the privilege to sit down and have many chats with the 'Boss'; he was always willing to listen and offer advice and showed genuine interest in me and my family. This was typical of him, warm, generous and a good friend to all he crossed paths with; a true officer and a gentleman.

"The Company will miss you dearly; you will always be in our hearts. My thoughts are with his family at this sad time. A true A Company hero, God bless and Rest In Peace Sir."

Lance Corporal Richie O'Connell, Section Second-in-Command, 4 Platoon, A Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"From the moment Lieutenant John 'the Sandman' Sanderson turned up at 1 Platoon, his bubbly and humorous character was evident from the very start. When we deployed to Kenya shortly after, he really showed us how incredibly keen he was through the amount of effort he put into everything and anything.

"His infectious enthusiasm and character not only spread amongst the soldiers in 1 Platoon but he quickly became highly regarded by the whole of A Company.

"He always genuinely took an interest in all of his men, not just their professional lives but their private lives as well, which sat well and was appreciated by them all. I know out here in

Afghanistan, he was always up for anything and game for the fight.

"Sir, we will all miss your sometimes terrible jokes and your crazy and funny stories of weekends past. You will be sadly missed by all of your men in 1 Platoon, A Company and 1 MERCIAN. Our thoughts are with your family and friends at this terrible time. STAND FIRM AND STRIKE HARD. Rest in Peace, a true officer and a gentleman."

LCpl Mick Hogan, B (Malta) Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Sir, you put up a good fight, and we would have loved to have brought you home with us but that seemingly was not meant to be ... Farewell Boss and thanks for always listening."

LCpl James Heath, B (Malta) Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"'All for one and one for all' was the 1 Platoon motto. He loved his job, his platoon and most of all his blokes.

"Mr Sanderson was always thinking about us and always wanted the best for us. We looked up to him as a boss and a friend because he was the best at both.

"John, you will never be forgotten and you will always be here with us."

Private Jordon Pickford, B (Malta) Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Mr Sanderson was the morale of this callsign and was always there to make us laugh when we were feeling down. You would always be up for a fight and we would always feel safe when you were on the ground with us.

"I will never forget you but now you can be at peace and smash the gym whenever you want. My thoughts go out to you and your family at this sad time."

Pte Blake Grimshaw, B (Malta) Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"I first met Mr Sanderson when I joined the Battalion in 2009. I was put in his Platoon, 1 Platoon. From the day I met him he was always talking about rugby and getting massive in the gym.

"He was undoubtedly a man for the lads. He would always crack jokes and boost the men's morale when we were down. He loved the fact that we were 1 Platoon, the best Platoon in his eyes.

"All the lads loved him as the Boss and he would do anything for anyone. A true inspiration to us all. Rest in Peace now Mr Sanderson."

Pte Liam Parr, B (Malta) Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"There aren't any words to describe the loss of Mr Sanderson. My thoughts and deepest sympathies go out to his family. Mr Sanderson was a true hero in our eyes.

"He always led from the front and was there for the lads through thick and thin. He always inspired the lads when times were bad and he truly had a heart of gold.

"Mr Sanderson always had the time to speak with us and see how we were. I remember one saying he gave us which was the motto 'All for one and one for all', he always made us look after each other.

"I am truly honoured to have served with Mr Sanderson and I will always remember him. You will never be forgotten and it can be truly said that he gave his today so those at home could have their tomorrow.

"Mr Sanderson was my boss, my friend and will always be in my thoughts."

The Men of 3 Platoon, A Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"John was quite simply the best of us. Compassionate, professional, and without a shadow of a doubt the nicest character you could meet.

"He always had time to talk, with anyone, and was invariably seen with a smile. He was also a consummate soldier and put his all into the job.

"He came out here more than anyone with a genuine compassion for the people of Helmand, and by all accounts demonstrated that time and time again with B (Malta) Company.

"He was a fantastic friend to all of us, not just his fellow officers but indeed anyone in his platoon, A Company or across the Battalion - whoever had the fortune to spend time with him.

"It is a terrible loss when someone with the heart and attitude of John is taken from us, and the Battalion is worse off with his passing. Our thoughts are with his family at this terrible time. Rest in Peace John."

COBRA 41A Multiple, B (Malta) Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"To a good man and a good leader. Your passing is a loss to us all. We will remember you always and we will strive to finish what you started. We all send our condolences to your family and loved ones and hope they all find peace within themselves.

"Rest easy now Boss."