

Private Thomas Christopher Lake, from 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, was killed in Afghanistan on Sunday 20 November 2011. He was taking part in a patrol to reassure the local population in the Jamal Kowi area of the Nahr-e Saraj district of central Helmand when he was caught in an explosion. He was airlifted to the field hospital at Camp Bastion where he was declared killed in action.

Private Lake, aged 29, from Watford, joined the Army in November 2009 and passed out of training in May 2010, joining 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (1 PWRR), known as 'The Tigers', in Germany shortly afterwards.

Upon joining the battalion he attended a number of courses - most notably the Infantry Assault Pioneers' Course and the Team Medics' Course, and he recently completed part one of the arduous Snipers' Course in Brecon, Wales.

He joined B Company and deployed to Canada with 4 Platoon in July 2010, and he stayed with that platoon for the rest of his training and subsequent deployment to Afghanistan. While new to the battalion, he was quickly recognised as an extremely competent and reliable soldier by his peers and his chain of command. Fit and confident, he demonstrated the ability to take on all manner of tasks and succeed.

Private Lake leaves behind a loving mother, Carol. He will be missed dearly by his friends and family and all those who knew him. Private Lake's mother, Carol, said: "Tom was a wonderful son and I will miss him more than I can say. He had so many friends who will remember him as a loyal, fun-loving action man who was always the first to try anything new and usually excelled at it. Tom loved the Army and was so proud to be a soldier; he died doing something he loved and believed in. I will always be proud of my boy.

"The amount of support, phone calls and flowers I have received pays tribute to the sort of man Tom was and I would like to thank everyone for their kind thoughts and words."

Lieutenant Colonel James Coote, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"Private Tom Lake epitomised the very best qualities of the British infantryman; he was a true Tiger - ever professional and totally committed to his mates and his battalion, he had an irrepressible smile and an understated manner that together made him hugely respected by all those that had the privilege to serve with him.

"Private Lake packed an almost impossible amount into his two years in the Army, both at work and off duty. Where many soldiers would have sought one specialisation in that time he had three - he was a medic, an Assault Pioneer and was also training as a sniper.

"Equally energetic out of uniform, he represented the battalion at football, easily earning a coveted place in the team in his first season. He also turned his hand with equal ease to skiing

and motorcycling and was passionate about sky diving.

"Older than many of his peers, he was often the man that they would turn to for help or advice; maturity and potential abounded and he was fully expected to attend the promotion cadre on his return to Germany.

"Private Lake's untimely death has denied the battalion of one of its brightest soldiers; we are all the worse off for his loss. As ever, the sincerest tribute comes from his friends in his platoon who described him simply as 'our best bloke'. Our thoughts and deepest condolences are with his mother Carol and with all those that had the honour to know him. Fierce Pride."

Lieutenant Colonel Tom Copinger-Symes, Commanding Officer, 5th Battalion The Rifles (5 RIFLES), Combined Force Nahr-e-Saraj (South), said:

"Private Tom Lake was a central figure in the tight-knit team of 'Tigers' from B Company, 1 PWRR, who occupy one of our most remote and rudimentary forward posts, known as Checkpoint Midanbazi.

"Visiting them ten days ago it was humbling to see how well they had adapted to their new surroundings and how quickly a special bond had formed between them all - that special bond known only to those who share in the privations, anxieties and excitements of front line combat.

"Private Lake was an indispensable part of his team. He was held in great esteem and affection by his comrades, and that special bond will not be broken by his tragic death. Instead he now joins the list of legends who, by their work and sacrifice, have made progress in this part of Afghanistan ever more attainable.

"As an honorary Rifleman, as a brother-in-arms, he will never be forgotten. The thoughts and prayers of every member of 5 RIFLES Battle Group go out to his mother Carol and his wider family and friends."

Major Ross Nott, Officer Commanding, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"Private Thomas Christopher Lake, Tom to his civilian friends and comrades, joined the British Army in late 2009 and successfully completed training in May of the following year. It didn't surprise anyone that he quickly established himself as a professional and popular member of The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment based in Paderborn, Germany.

"He was a natural soldier; physically fit, mature and easy-going, he fitted in perfectly. From his home in Northwood, Middlesex, Private Lake had joined his county regiment and deployed

alongside men who shared his background, values and humour.

"Professional to the end, he died as he had lived: serving his country with mates whose trust, respect and friendship he had earned and shared. An older brother to many in the company, soldiers looked to him for help and encouragement and were never disappointed.

"Amongst the very finest soldiers I have had the privilege to command, Private Lake's death has undoubtedly robbed the battalion of one of its rising stars. His ambition to promote to Lance Corporal following his deployment to Afghanistan would have been assured.

"He will be sorely missed by all those who were fortunate enough to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with him. His generosity of spirit and company will leave a hole in our ranks which cannot be filled. The prayers and thoughts of all in B Company are with his mother Carol; he cannot be replaced and will not be forgotten."

Second Lieutenant Rob Coates, 4 Platoon Commander, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"As both a person and a soldier Private Tom Lake excelled. One of the real characters in the platoon, he was a constant source of entertainment. Hours raced by when I was acting as watchkeeper with Private Lake on 'stag', due to his ability to chat endlessly on any topic.

"The resident table tennis champion, Private Lake was always looking for a way to keep morale up and the lads entertained. His love for a good brew endeared him to everyone and he was always the first to put the kettle on after a patrol. Private Lake lived with his mum Carol and he always made sure that he rang home regularly to see how she was.

"In the field, he proved himself a diligent, hardworking and conscientious soldier. He quickly learned how to build up a rapport with the locals and his sense of humour proved its worth many times over. He was the elder statesman of the platoon and as a result all of the lads looked up to him and sought his advice.

"My thoughts and prayers go to his mum Carol, family and friends at this terrible time, but they should be proud of the man Private Lake was, and his memory will live with us all forever."

Warrant Officer Class Two Lee Gidalla, Company Sergeant Major, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"Private Lake was a very popular member of B Company and was thought of highly by all. He was a more mature lad who was always setting the example to those around him and guiding others where needed. Since the day he joined B Company he set the highest standards and was a pleasure to work with.

"Private Lake's ability was outstanding, and as such he would have had a bright future within the battalion. He was on the top of the list for the promotion course after the tour. He was also a top class footballer and rode a motorbike, which is one of the reasons why we got on so well.

He will be sorely missed by B Company and all who knew him and he was a top class soldier."

Sergeant Martin Caines, 4 Platoon Sergeant, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"Private Lake was the best soldier in my platoon without a doubt. Always the first soldier to have his kit on, ready to take the fight to the enemy with his sharpshooter rifle.

"Throughout all the training we completed together, Tom was always the first soldier to pick things up and always tried to get the rest of the platoon to understand. He would have made an outstanding non-commissioned officer and an excellent commander of men. Around the checkpoint he was always helping out with a smile on his face and a brew in his hand with his bright green Rab jacket on.

"Everyone looked up to Tom because of his age and level of maturity. He and I were planning a trip to the Nüburgring on our bikes after we got back. It was a pleasure to have him under my command. It is a sad loss and he will be missed by me and B Company complete; missed but never forgotten."

Corporal Oliver Kennedy, Section Commander, 4 Platoon, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"Lakey, probably one of the best soldiers within the platoon - liked by everyone. An absolute hardworker and one of those people that would never have to be asked to do anything.

"Being a soldier came as a natural instinct to him. A positive person in all situations with great potential, he would see the good in all. My heartfelt condolences go out to his family and friends. Gone but never forgotten. Rest in Peace.

Corporal Jonathan St Paul, Section Commander, 4 Platoon, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"When I joined B Company it became apparent that Tom was one of the top soldiers in 4 Platoon. He was very 'switched-on' and he displayed the abilities of a natural leader. He was keen, and always there to offer help and do jobs with the lads.

"He was funny and always came out with some cracking banter and jokes. He was bright and cheery and morale was high with Tom around. He loved a brew and was always punching them back - the kettle was always on and water boiling with Tom.

"He had a talent for ping pong and was hard to beat. Playing him was a great laugh; I had a right crack but never managed to win! Tom will be dearly missed by me and the company."

Lance Corporal James Nopps, Section Second-in-Command, 4 Platoon, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"I have known Tom for as long as he has been in the battalion. He was a bit older than most of the lads, but that showed with the maturity and clever thinking he brought to the team. Tom was, and always will be, one of the main characters in the platoon. Everyone got along with him and nothing bad could be said about him.

"He was easily one of the best private soldiers in the company. He was switched on enough to be chosen to be a sharpshooter. As one of the soldiers he always did his duty, straightaway and to the best of his ability. I know for a fact that he would easily have passed a Fire Team Commanders' Cadre to become a Lance Corporal.

"He loved to play table tennis, which he was very good at, and some of the games we played out here were pretty tense. I will always remember singing 'Rocky - Eye of the Tiger' to him as I had beaten him and the way he said he would beat me in our next match.

"Tom was an excellent soldier and he had a very bright future ahead. I and all the lads in the checkpoint will especially miss him and everything he brought to the platoon."

Private Zachary Myers, 4 Platoon, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"I don't wish to sound clichéd, but Tom was a top bloke. He always had a smile and a joke at the ready. If anybody needed to do something he would lend a hand. In the checkpoint he helped us waterproof our beds, built a shelter over the kitchen and was a great general handyman.

"He lived life to the full, be it riding his motorbike, sky diving or waterskiing. Anything he could try, he would. Tom was always putting other people before himself. He always made the brews. He would always organise stuff for us to do.

"The night before we flew out he ordered us a curry and we all sat in my room and ate a last meal together. Tom was a great bloke and I'm glad to call him my friend. He will be sorely missed."

Private Guthrie Garnham, 4 Platoon, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"Tom was my good friend. If I ever needed to get something off my chest he was the first person I would go to. Tom lived his life 'to the max', and was always a joy to be around. I got along with him from the first day he turned up to our unit.

"I can't imagine what his family must be going through right now, but his family at 1 PWRR will forever miss him and never forget him. His spirit will forever fight with us. We love and miss you Tom."

Private William Keough, 4 Platoon, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"How do you sum up the life of a close friend into a few paragraphs? Answer, you can't. What you can do is remember the truly great things about them. The things that made you laugh and the things that make you cry now that they are gone.

"I was lucky enough to know Tom as a work colleague but more importantly as a dear friend. I know it's a cliché to say that he was the heart and soul of the platoon and the best of the best, but I find myself stuck for any other way to describe him.

"Tom was the easiest guy in the platoon to get along with and he was both funny and smart. To me he was an older brother and someone I could confide in or talk complete rubbish with. He was always the first to lend a helping hand and without doubt the centre of the platoon's morale.

"My lasting thought of Tom will be him in a bright green duvet jacket, brew in hand and smiling. He will forever be missed and never replaced; a great soldier and one of the best friends anyone could ask for."

Private Kyle Harris, 4 Platoon, B Company, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, said:

"Tom Lake loved a brew. One of the best lads we knew and he always offered a helping hand. He always had high morale and he gave morale to others. Everyone in the platoon and in the company respected him massively.

"He was the first person everyone would go to for advice whatever you needed. If you were down he would always help you to be happy again. He was always cracking jokes and he loved his sports, be it sky diving or skiing. He loved to go to new places, meet new people and try new things.

"He was a fantastic soldier, he was very reliable and a true friend who was always putting other people before himself and trying to make life easier for those around him. You couldn't ask for a nicer or more generous bloke.

"We love him and miss him and his spirit will always be with us through the ups and downs of the rest of the tour. He will be sorely missed and never forgotten."