

1ST BATTALION, COLDSTREAM GUARDS

Guardsman Michael Sweeney of 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards died as a result of an explosion that happened in the Babaji District of central Helmand province on 1st April.

The last three and a half months saw Guardsman Sweeney deploy on the full range of complex combat operations in the Babaji area. As well as conducting daily patrols he was involved in the security of Check Points near his Patrol Base. It was whilst on patrol to one of these Check Points with a resupply for his comrades that Guardsman Sweeney trod on a hidden bomb which took his life.

Guardsman Michael Sweeney joined the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards after training at the Infantry Training Centre Catterick. He was posted to Number 2 Company in May 2008 for a short time before being posted to Number 7 Company Coldstream Guards based in London.

In his short time in the Army Guardsman Sweeney achieved a huge amount. In June 2008 he paraded on the Queen's Birthday Parade followed by a jungle Exercise in Belize later that same year. With a short turnaround in the UK he soon deployed to Kenya in January 2009 for an extended exercise before returning to London to take part, once again, in the Queen's Birthday Parade.

Surrounding his time in Number 7 Company was the knowledge that he would most likely deploy to Afghanistan on Operation HERRICK 11 and he therefore participated in elements of the Battalion's pre-deployment training. In December 2009 Guardsman Sweeney was posted back to the 1st Battalion and deployed to Helmand Province.

Guardsman Sweeney was posted to Number 2 Platoon in Number 1 Company, based in Patrol Base 4 in the Babaji Area of Operations. He deployed on the full range of complex combat operations. As well as conducting daily patrols he was involved in the security of Check Points near his Patrol Base.

Guardsman Sweeney aspired to join the Signal Platoon on return from this tour and then attend a Junior Non Commissioned Officer course. He was a young but very motivated Guardsman who thrived in the environs of Helmand Province. He was a highly likeable and respected member of a very close knit company.

Guardsman Sweeney was aged 19 and came from Blyth in Northumberland. He leaves behind his parents Michael and Kimberley, brother Shaun and fiancée Michelle.

Guardsman Sweeney's family paid the following tribute:

"We are devastated by the loss of Michael. He was the greatest son, brother and fiancé to

Michelle you could possibly ask for. Michael was a proud Guardsman and we are immensely proud of what Michael has achieved in such a short lifetime.

"Michael loved to spend time with family and friends which meant so much to him and he was extremely giving to all. He touched so many people's hearts and he will be greatly missed."

Lieutenant Colonel T W Gray (Toby), Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"A true son of the north country; proud Northumbrian, true Coldstreamer and outstanding soldier. Beyond this, he was simply a super bloke. Michael Sweeney was selfless amongst his friends, dedicated to his duty and utterly professional at all times. His self effacing humour and generous nature were the hallmarks of his service in the Regiment and values by which he lived his life. He improved the lives of all he met.

"He crammed much into his short time in the military, more than many do in a full career. A born enthusiast, he was a net contributor to the team and to all who worked alongside him. His star was rapidly rising and the foundations of a highly successful career lay before him. He served his Battalion, Company and Platoon bravely and honourably. He fought bravely on the battlefield and brought light into the hearts of his comrades. His tragic and untimely death has robbed us of one of the brightest young guardsmen in the Regiment. We take solace in the fact that he died in the course of doing the job he loved and was passionate about.

"Always smiling, always happy, always thinking of others; he will be most sorely missed by his comrades in the Coldstream family. Our thoughts, prayers and hearts are with Michael's fiancée Michelle and parents as they attempt to come to terms with their loss at this most tragic time."

Major T P O Till (Toby), Company Commander Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"I first met Guardsman Sweeney when I was heading on R&R and Guardsman Sweeney was arriving at Camp Bastion. It can be a daunting prospect deploying on your first tour of Afghanistan but I had already heard from Number 7 Company in London that Guardsman Sweeney was a very special young man. Needless to say he was there sitting with his mates, confident and capable, a reassuring presence in a period of uncertainty.

"On arriving with the Company, Guardsman Sweeney quickly proved to all in his Platoon, and the Company, that he was a man you could rely on; hardworking, conscientious and brave, exactly what you want in any young Guardsman.

"It was his personality and spirit though which will be most sorely missed. A keen boxer, Guardsman Sweeney was often on the bag in the gym, jabbing away, or playing some volleyball with or against our Afghan Comrades. A proud Northumberland lad, he was full of banter and had a cracking sense of humour and was equally popular with his fellow Guardsmen in the Company as he was back home.

"My heart goes out to his family and many friends in Blyth. We are all in a state of shock but still remain fully committed to getting the job done right to the end of our tour; young Michael Sweeney would not have had it any other way."

Second Lieutenant J R Howlin (James), Platoon Commander Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"Today I have tragically lost an excellent Guardsman and a fine young man. Guardsman Sweeney had a big impact on me in a very short space of time. On first meeting, he immediately struck me as being an absolutely genuine young man, the kind you could rely upon to perform any task thrown at him with the utmost professionalism, dedication and commitment. This he proved time and again both in camp and out on the ground. He was never one to shy away from anything and always gave things his all, regardless of the difficulty of the undertaking, without complaint and without question; a model young Guardsman.

"Further to this, he was perhaps one of the most selfless individuals I have met, always looking out for those around him, putting others before himself, the mark of a truly outstanding bloke. He will be sorely missed both by myself, the boys of 2 Platoon and indeed the Company, all of whom he touched in his time out here. He has left a hole that will not be filled but we are better for having known him. It was a privilege to serve alongside you Guardsman Sweeney and your courage and sacrifice will not be forgotten. My heartfelt condolences go out to his fiancée Michelle and his family and friends at this tragic time."

Warrant Officer Class 2 Steve Taylor, Company Sergeant Major Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"Guardsman Sweeney joined Number 1 Company with an incredibly positive and happy outlook. Always one to say hello whenever I saw him, he was a Guardsman that when given a task would easily give 100% into whatever he was set. This smart young man had a very promising career ahead of him and the Regiment will certainly miss his friendly and sociable character. testing time during this tour.

"Guardsman Sweeney, you will never ever be forgotten and the qualities that you had as a person and Guardsman is one that I will relay to any new and valued member of the Regiment for years to come. My thoughts are with you and your family at this tragic time."

Sergeant Christopher Hunter, Platoon Sergeant Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"Today is a very sad day and a day that will be remembered for the rest of my life, the day that the life of one of my finest Guardsmen was cruelly taken. Michael Sweeney was a valued character and team member of the Platoon. He always remained professional and would always go that extra step to ensure he was helping his friends out. Always with a smile on his face, he was proud to be doing the job he loved and relished the responsibilities bestowed upon him. He is sorely missed by the Platoon and his sacrifice will never be forgotten. My thoughts go out to his friends and family at this tragically difficult time, but they can be proud and honoured that

their life was touched by such a unique and special individual."

Lance Sergeant James Clough, Section Commander Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"Guardsman Sweeney arrived to join 2 Platoon and Number 1 Company Group in December 2009. In his short time with us he settled in extremely well and bonded closely with the boys. He was always asking 'what needs doing' and would never shy away from helping anyone out or complain about anything that was asked of him. He was a good soldier and enjoyed what he did. What is more, he was a cracking young lad and I am proud to have served alongside him. My thoughts go out to his fiancée and his parents at this difficult time."

Lance Corporal Matthew Evans, Section Second in Command Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"I arrived with Guardsman Sweeney just before Christmas. He settled in to the Platoon straight away. He showed his motivation and physical robustness by always carrying the heavy equipment and never once complained. When asked to do something he always did it to the best of his ability. He will be sadly missed in the Platoon and he will never be forgotten. My thoughts are with all his family at this sad time. You will never be forgotten mate."

Lance Corporal Liam Rowley, Section Second in Command Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"There's a lot I can say about you Sweeney. You brought laughter and smiles everywhere you went. You will be greatly missed as a friend to me and Sarah and all the people who knew you. You will also be missed as a Coldstream Guardsman. A top bloke, a great friend and a fantastic soldier, it was a pleasure working with you."

Guardsman Byron Fry, Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"I have known Michael for the last six months. We have worked together, lived together and shared each other's company. It has been a privilege to have known him so well. He was my best mate in Number 2 Platoon and we always shared laughs, putting reality into surreal circumstances. My heart goes out to Michelle and to his parents and little brother. I am gutted about Michael's death, I will never forget him and sorely miss him."

Guardsman Andrew Legge, Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"I have known Sweeney since I came back off R&R. He was a caring man, keen to introduce himself, which is always a good thing. He would do anything for anyone and was always up for a game of volleyball. My love goes out to his family and fiancée."

Drummer Christian Blackie, Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream

Guards, said:

"Sweeney's death is a tragedy. He has to have been one of the nicest and most thoughtful people I have had the pleasure of knowing. Anybody that has ever known him knows that he has a heart of gold. He was always trying to help people and look out for his mates. My heart goes out to his fiancée and her young son who you could tell he loved dearly as he would always talk of them and tell me how he missed them and how much he was looking forward to getting married. He was a kind, sweet man and he will be greatly missed. My deepest condolences as I know how tragic this loss is."

Guardsman Michael Moran, Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"You made the ultimate sacrifice and will be sorely missed by everyone in Number 1 Company. We will all keep our heads up and keep smiling in memory of the good times we had together but we will miss you loads. Rest in peace mate."

Guardsman David Collier, Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"I haven't known Sweeney for long as he arrived out here when I was on R&R, however, as he is from up North near me, we bonded quickly. Most of the free time we got I would see Sweeney playing volleyball or in the gym. When we were on guard we would talk about the things we would do when we got home. I know he has a fiancée and I feel massively for her loss. My heart goes out to her and his family. I will never forget you."

Guardsman Lee Hodgson, Number 2 Platoon, Number 1 Company, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, said:

"Guardsman Sweeney was one of those guys you instantly took a liking to. Within the first couple of days in Number 7 Company together I knew we were going to be good mates. He had a good sense of humour and we spent many nights out in Woolwich together. His tragic loss has been felt by us all and I will miss him sorely. My thoughts and prayers are with his family and fiancée Michelle at this difficult time. Rest in peace buddy, we will never forget you."