

Lieutenant Edward Drummond-Baxter and Lance Corporal Siddhanta Kunwar from 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles (1RGR) were killed on Tuesday 30 October 2012 while on patrol in the Nahr-e Saraj district of Helmand Province. Both men were attached to 40 Commando Royal Marines.

Lieutenant Drummond-Baxter and Lance Corporal Kunwar were based in CheckPoint Prrang in the southern area of Nahr-e Saraj. On 30 October they were participating in a shura (meeting) with Afghan Uniformed Policemen inside the checkpoint. On completion of the shura, they were shot and killed by a man wearing an Afghan police uniform who had been attending the meeting.

LANCE CORPORAL SIDDHANTA KUNWAR

1ST BATTALION THE ROYAL GURKHA RIFLES

Lance Corporal Siddhanta Kunwar deployed to Afghanistan on 3 October 2012 as a Sniper Section Commander in the acting rank of Lance Corporal. He was serving with A (Delhi) Company, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, attached to 40 Commando Royal Marines as part of Transition Support Unit Nahr-e Saraj. He was based in Check Point Prrang in the southern part of Nahr-e Saraj District, Helmand Province. He was on his third operational tour of Afghanistan.

Lance Corporal Siddhanta was born on 19 June 1984 in Pokhara, Nepal, where he lived with his mother and father. He passed the arduous selection for the Brigade of Gurkhas on 17 December 2004 and having completed his year-long infantry training joined 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles in October 2005.

Very soon after his arrival in 1RGR he deployed with the Battalion to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2005-2006 as part of the European Union Force in support of the Bosnian Government. Lance Corporal Siddhanta then moved with 1RGR to Brunei where he conducted extensive jungle training and qualified as a sniper in 2007. In late 2007 and into 2008 he deployed to Afghanistan on Operation Herrick 7 where he served in Garmsir in southern Helmand Province. In 2009 he successfully passed a Junior NCO selection course and in 2010 returned to Afghanistan with 1RGR on Operation Herrick 12 to the Nahr-e Saraj area of Helmand Province. It was during this tour more than ever that his calm good humour, sharp mind and huge operational experience became a touchstone for his fellow soldiers.

LCpl Siddhanta Kunwar was an outstanding soldier and a true Gurkha. He displayed the calmness of mind, cheerfulness in adversity and loyalty throughout his many operational tours - qualities that the Brigade of Gurkhas hold dear. He served with many of the Companies within the Battalion and his loss will be deeply felt throughout 1RGR.

He leaves behind his mother, Krishna Maya Kunwar, his father, Shyam Kumar Kunwar, stepmother Chhali Devi Kunwar, his four sisters; Shova, Shyandya, Smita and Sardha Kunwar and his elder brother Bhupendra Kunwar.

The family of Lance Corporal Siddhanta Kunwar said:

"We are deeply shocked, disheartened and in disbelief that Siddhanta is no longer with us. But we shall treasure all the good things he did. He enjoyed immensely of his profession and was fully committed towards it. He has made us proud. The whole family misses him dearly."

Lieutenant Colonel David Robinson, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Siddhanta Kunwar was a great character and a tough, professional Gurkha soldier with a proven and impressive operational record. Strong and highly experienced, he stood out from the crowd not only as a highly capable sniper but also for his smile and sense of fun, whatever the situation he found himself in.

"On this, his third tour of Afghanistan, he knew the dangers and understood better than most what it meant to do his job at the toughest end of soldiering. As such he was a role model for the younger soldiers around him. They, in turn, responded greatly to his guidance and experience but also to his caring nature. Away from operations, he loved his sport and was a great team player; he loved nothing more than having fun with his mates on the sports field.

"Siddhanta was a proud soldier and was immensely proud to be a Gurkha. He was one of the cornerstones of the Sniper Platoon where he was part of a close-knit team who were justifiably confident in their ability. He would have done anything to support his comrades and friends around him; I know they will miss him deeply.

"The Regiment has lost a fine young man who epitomised all that makes the Gurkhas so special. Living always so far from home, Gurkha units are particularly close-knit and the loss of Lance Corporal Siddhanta is a bitter blow, felt keenly by all ranks and families of 1RGR. We will mourn his tragic passing and our thoughts and prayers are with his

family in Nepal and friends at this terrible time."

Lieutenant Colonel Matt Jackson Royal Marines, Commanding Officer, 40 Commando Royal Marines said:

"Lance Corporal Siddhanta Kunwar epitomised everything that a Gurkha should be; he was dedicated, professional and brave. This was his third deployment to Afghanistan and he was continuing to excel in everything that he did, but especially in his role as a sniper, where his field-craft skills were beyond reproach. It is clear that he thrived on the challenges that operations bring and enjoyed using the skills that he worked so hard to gain; he was never found wanting. He demonstrated the highest qualities of a Gurkha soldier and his legacy lives on in Delhi Company.

"It is a huge privilege for me personally to command a Company of Gurkhas and to have known Lance Corporal Siddhanta, however briefly. We took him, and have taken Delhi Company, into the Commando family as one of our own. His loss will therefore not only be felt by the Brigade of Gurkhas and Delhi Company but also by everyone serving within 40 Commando Group Royal Marines. His sacrifice will never be forgotten and he will always be in our thoughts.

"My thoughts and prayers go to his friends and family as they struggle to come to terms with his loss. I offer you small comfort in knowing that Siddhanta died in the company of those who loved him for everything he was and everything that he did. My thoughts are with them at this exceptionally difficult time."

Major Dave Pack, Officer Commanding A (Delhi) Company, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Lance Corporal Siddhanta was an integral part of the Sniper Platoon within Support (Medicina) Company and of A (Delhi) Company. He was an impeccable soldier with tremendous potential, who had already shown himself to be a leader of men. He excelled in his role as a sniper and as a junior commander. As a sniper he was out of the top draw; fit, robust and with outstanding marksmanship skills. As a NCO he was a shining example to the junior riflemen in his check point; always leading by example and consummately professional in all he did. He was the epitome of a Gurkha soldier.

"Lance Corporal Siddhanta was not only a talented soldier, but an incredibly likeable man. Everything about him was good: his cheerfulness, his enthusiasm, his attitude. His family, friends and colleagues should be incredibly proud of him. It was a privilege to

know him and to have him fighting alongside me.

"I and all members of A (Delhi) Company are devastated; the pain and emptiness is indescribable. But this is nothing compared to the grief his family will be experiencing and our thoughts and prayers are with them. Their son will never be forgotten; he was a special man who made an indelible mark on everyone who knew him."

Major Dhyan Prasad Rai, Gurkha Major, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"The untimely death of Lance Corporal Siddhanta Kunwar is extremely sad news for us in The Royal Gurkha Rifles and the wider Gurkha family. Having been a sniper since 2008, Siddhanta was of the best in the Battalion. He was a supremely competent soldier who excelled in marksmanship and field-craft - the essence of our trade. He had proven himself time and again on operations. This was his third operational tour in Afghanistan. Siddhanta was also a fine sportsman whose natural ability at basketball and volleyball made him a fixture in the various competitions held regularly in Battalion.

"His example is exactly in line with the best traditions of nigh on 200 years of dedicated Gurkha soldiering in the service of the United Kingdom. He has made us all extremely proud to have served alongside him.

"As he is a loss to us, so he is a terrible loss to his family in Nepal. Our thoughts at this time are with them who will bear this sad news the heaviest of all."

Major Alex Biggs, Officer Commanding Support Company, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Lance Corporal Siddhanta was an integral part of the Sniper Platoon within Support (Medicina) Company. An impeccable soldier of much potential, he had set an excellent foundation for his future career. An experienced sniper who has excelled in the harsh environment of Afghanistan, he was always forward leaning and utterly reliable.

"Very much a team player he was always keen to help and join in at both work and play. A keen sportsman he would always represent the Company whenever the opportunity arose. As a person Lance Corporal Siddhanta was a gentleman. Warm, friendly, emphatically polite and outgoing he was an integral part of both Company and Battalion. A man of quiet wit and good sense of humour he was very much part of the RGR family and will be sorely missed."

Warrant Officer Class 2 Bishnu Thapa, Officer Commanding Sniper Platoon, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Siddhanta was a very loyal, professional, fantastic, engaging and brave Gurkha soldier. He was popular and highly capable in his profession and was warm, witty, clever and kind. He was one of the finest snipers in the platoon. He was the veteran of Herrick 7 and 12 and was clear in his motivation for returning on Herrick 17.

"I am stunned by his unexpected passing. He was an immensely proud soldier. He epitomised the very best qualities expected from a true Gurkha soldier. He will be sorely missed by all within the platoon and his memory will endure in our hearts.

"Our prayer and thoughts go out to his family and relatives. May Goddess Durga give strengths to overcome at this very difficult time."

Rifleman Tuljung Gurung, Support Company, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Everyone knows that we have to leave this world, leaving everything behind. Today we lost one of our close friends, Siddhanta Kunwar. It is a sad day for all of us. It's too hard to explain in just a few sentences how special he was. He was one of the great 'numberi' (cohort of recruits) from my intake. He was very helpful to everyone no matter how hard the work was. He stood as a hero among us and inspired people by his performance. He had the ability to make people take him into their hearts in a short period of time. We came to Support Company together which gave me more opportunity to see how good he was. Looking to him I'm so proud to be one of his numberi and also so sad. We'll miss him a lot, may his soul get peace in heaven."

Rifleman Milan Rai, Delhi Coy, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Lance Corporal Siddhanta was my commander. I used to call him 'Sid Dai', which means he was like my elder brother. He was very keen, loyal and committed to his work as well as energetic and very disciplined soldier. He never shied away from any challenge and was caring and sharing with everyone.

"Wherever you are, Sid Dai, stay safe. I am going to miss you. You will always remain in our hearts and memories."

Rifleman Rem Bahadur Gurung, 1 Platoon, A (Delhi) Company, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Lance Corporal Siddhanta Guruji was a great person. He was like a brother to me. He was an always cheerful person. He was one of the best Snipers. I will miss him so badly."