

Bravo Company, 40 Commando Royal Marines

Marine Steven James Birdsall was born on the 6 October 1989. He lived in Warrington with his parents and younger sister, Melissa. In December 2007 he joined the Royal Marines, aged 18, passing for duty as a Royal Marines Commando on the 7 November 2008.

On completion of training he attended the Defence School of Transport in Leconfield where he gained his full range of driving licences, including his HGV driver qualification. He joined 40 Commando Royal Marines in January 2009.

Shortly after, he deployed with Delta Company on Exercise TAURUS; a large scale amphibious deployment, taking him through the Mediterranean to the Far East and culminating in a jungle warfare package in Brunei.

In September 2009 he moved to Bravo Company and conducted six months of Mission Specific Training for this operational tour with 40 Commando to Afghanistan. He deployed to Helmand in April 2010 and was based at Patrol Base EZERAY, in northern Sangin.

Bravo Company has conducted numerous joint operations with the Afghan National Security Forces aimed at bettering the lives of ordinary Afghans by improving security and increasing their freedom of movement.

Marine Birdsall's family have made the following statement:

"There are no words that could ever express the heartache of losing our beautiful son, Steven, who was always so selfless, brave and fearless. Loving brother to Melissa, grandson to Grandma, Granny and Granddad and a much loved nephew and cousin.

"Steven had so many friends back home in Warrington and in 40 Commando Royal Marines, and we are forever thankful to the lads who were with him when he needed them most. See you later mate, we are so very proud of you, love Mum and Dad."

Lieutenant Colonel Paul James, Commanding Officer 40 Commando Group, Combined Force Sangin, said:

"Marine Steven Birdsall was a brilliant young marine whose gallantry, selflessness and determination impressed all who knew him. He was strong, brave, full of spirit and full of character.

"A talented footballer, he played for 40 Commando immediately on joining the Unit and quickly proved to be a fit motivated marine who inspired others. He possessed a sharp mind and a big and generous heart – he loved his family, his friends and his fellow marines; and they adored

him in return.

"He was a consummate professional; forever focused, very proud and utterly dependable; yet always cheerful and magnanimous. He was the perfect marine. He sadly died on patrol in northern Sangin, doing the job he loved; protecting the people.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with his parents, his sister, his family and his friends. He will be sadly missed by all in 40 Commando. Marine Steven Birdsall was, and always will be, a Royal Marine Commando."

Major Mark Totten Royal Marines, Officer Commanding Bravo Company, 40 Commando Royal Marines, said:

"Marine Stevie Birdsall was a jovial, fun-loving and exceptionally talented young man who has been taken in his prime. His ability on the sports field had ensured considerable success as a footballer prior to joining the Royal Marines, with whom he developed and flourished.

"The determination that led to his sporting success allowed him to complete Initial Commando Training, despite setback through injury and was a permanent fixture of his approach to Service life. He sharpened his field craft skills with Delta Company in the jungle of Brunei before joining Bravo Company for deployment to Afghanistan.

"He never missed an opportunity to excel whether at work or playing football. Arguably his finest hour was leading a scratch team to success in the Cancun Beach Football Festival, a champagne moment that remains unequalled amongst those who shared it.

"Once deployed, Stevie brought enormous courage, humour and emotional support to his section; he laughed, larked and listened within the Patrol Base and was a centre of gravity for morale. On the ground his contribution was unstinting; sharp and alert, even when carrying the most burdensome equipment.

"He was quick to occupy exposed positions within a patrol and faced the enemy with gallantry. Stevie's last act was to watch over a Royal Engineer team as they laboured in the Afghan sun. He was a model Bootneck, true friend and comrade.

"The love of his family was demonstrated daily through the marvellous packages he received and selflessly shared; our thoughts and prayers are with them in this most difficult time."

Lieutenant Jon Phelps, Officer Commanding 11 Troop Bravo Company, 40 Commando Royal Marines, said:

"Marine Birdsall was a fantastic marine who showed huge potential for the future. A rising star of the present generation of young Marines, he was always selfless in how he went about his business. Unassuming, intelligent and professional until the last, he could always be relied upon no matter what the task.

"It was this, 'can do' attitude and adaptability that often placed him in positions requiring a

special dependency in a man; something he relished. An enthusiastic and competitive sportsman he could often be found partnering his mates in the gym giving as good as he got.

"Marine Birdsall was the ideal Marine who made my job a lot easier. He truly embodied the values of the Corps. His character is irreplaceable, and will be sorely missed by all of 11 Troop.

"It is a testament to his determination that he was strong enough to hold on until he was back in the UK with his family. Our thoughts and prayers are with his parents, younger sister, relatives and friends. Rest in Peace Royal."

Sergeant Jason Wood, 11 Troop Sergeant, Bravo Company, 40 Commando Royal Marines, said:

"Birdy was a great lad, always smiling and took being a Bootneck in his stride. He was always cheerful, never 'dripped' and was a well liked member of the Troop.

"He will be sorely missed by all who knew and worked with him. All the lads in 11 Troop are thinking of his family at this very difficult time."

Marine Olly Spence and Marine Matt Baldwin, 11 Troop, Bravo Company, 40 Commando Royal Marines, said:

"As a Marine, Birdy was the same as he was at playing football, strong, full of heart and always worked hard for the team. As a Light Machine Gunner in the section, his drills on the gun were as slick as his wet hair after a morning shower. As a mate he was second to none, he had an unparalleled sense of humour on, as well as off the job.

"He always listened especially when you needed it most. Birdy was a highly respected member of the Royal Marines 'sun bathing team'; his healthy glow making him popular with the ladies. Whilst exploring Egypt he gained valuable experience by using his boyish good looks to get familiar with the female side of the Royal Navy.

"Judging by all the welfare packages he received, he was obviously much loved by his family and friends, as he was by his Troop. His good heart and cheeky smile will always be remembered by those who had the pleasure of knowing him."

Marine David Shutler, Delta Company, 40 Commando Royal Marines, said:

"Marine Birdsall, or 'Birdy' as he was known amongst the lads, was a good friend of mine. He was a quiet lad with a huge personality and was well respected within Delta Company. He was strong, fit and very dependable. Birdy always gave 100 per cent at all times, never dripping when times got hard.

"Before deploying on Op HERRICK 12, he went on a lads' holiday to Cancun with some of his troop. I'll never forget him turning up at the airport before flying to Cancun at 6am, worse for wear from the night before.

"I remember how happy he was when he told me they won a four-a-side beach football tournament, beating the Americans in the final. He was a very good footballer; we played

together for 40 Commando RM before deploying.

"Birdy, I'm going to miss not having you around, mate. My thoughts are with you, your family and friends back home at this sad time. Life in the Corps won't be the same without you."