

33 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal)

The Ministry of Defence has confirmed the death of Sapper David Watson from 33 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) on Thursday 31 December 2009.

Sapper David Watson, born on 28 October 1986, from Newcastle upon Tyne, and known to his friends as 'The Leg', deployed on Op HERRICK 11 as a Number 3 Operator in a Conventional Munitions Disposal Team as part of the Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group within the UK Counter IED Task Force.

Sapper Watson died of wounds sustained in an explosion caused by an Improvised Explosive Device in the vicinity of Patrol Base Blenheim in the Sangin region of Helmand Province.

Lieutenant Colonel Gareth Bex Royal Logistic Corps, Commanding Officer Counter IED Task Force, said:

"Sapper Watson was the epitome of a warrior: fearless, ruthlessly determined and a great team player. An immensely proud parachute and commando trained soldier he was highly respected by his peers; they looked up to him with the deference that individuals of his sheer quality warrant.

"Although this was his first operational tour Sapper Watson was a man very much in his element out here in Afghanistan; if ever there was a man born for soldiering it was him.

"Sapper Watson excelled on operations in Afghanistan, reveling in the vital role his team conducted. I am humbled and inspired by the courage and resolve men like him show every day in ridding Afghanistan of the threat from IEDs.

"Although it is a tragedy to lose such a fine soldier, it is a comfort knowing that he served a noble cause and that his efforts are recognised in Helmand and back home in the UK.

"Sapper Watson will always have a place in our hearts and his loss will hit the Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group and wider Counter IED Task Force very hard, but we will never tire in our efforts.

"The Counter IED battle is tough and ongoing, but he knew that we are making steady progress. This success is due to the courage and deeds of men like Sapper Watson and we must continue to hold our nerve and plough on with the same determination that he showed."

Major Tim Gould QGM Royal Logistic Corps, Officer Commanding Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group, said of him:

"Sapper Watson was brought up in Whickham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and joined the Royal Engineers in February 2007.

"It is incredible what an inordinate amount this promising young Sapper managed to fit in to his relatively short career. He qualified in his chosen trade as a Builder and Structural Finisher and in the field of Combat Engineering.

"A natural soldier and candidate for both Airborne and All-Arms Commando training, Sapper Watson completed both arduous courses within the first two years of his career. He excelled on Pegasus Company, so much so that he was awarded the honour of being the course top student.

"On meeting Sapper Watson you could very quickly see that it was not only his outstanding athletic fitness that gave him the accolade of best student on Pegasus Company, it was his team spirit, his drive and his willingness to help his comrades in every way he knew how.

"He was delighted to be posted to 33 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), specifically the Airborne Troop of 49 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) Royal Engineers.

"A man-mountain of a young man, Sapper Watson was as strong as an ox and was completely unsurpassed in any challenge of a physical nature; he was a veritable 'machine' in these terms and countless numbers of his peers sought to emulate his exacting standards.

"Sapper Watson was the archetypal gentle giant; strong and silent, the big brother that you never had. He was the one that you wanted by your side no matter what you were doing, be it on a night out in town, the sports pitch or on the battlefield here in Helmand.

"What does a man like Sapper Watson do in his spare time? As you would undoubtedly expect of a soldier who had passed so many arduous courses, he loved to fell run and was a keen mountain biker.

"This was his first experience of an operational deployment and one that he was very much looking forward to. From the very outset he had tackled every challenge head on in his characteristically unflappable manner.

"He excelled in his chosen profession and was carving out a very bright and promising career for himself.

"To say that it is a tragedy to lose a soldier of Sapper Watson's calibre is an understatement. This remarkable young man leaves a substantial void in our hearts and we will honour his memory in both our thoughts and our deeds in our endeavours here in Helmand."

Lieutenant Colonel David Southall MBE Royal Engineers, Commanding Officer 33 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) said:

"Sapper Dave 'The Leg' Watson was a remarkable soldier. Known and respected for his phenomenal fitness, this Commando, Parachute and Bomb Disposal trained Sapper was simply a cut above the rest - no one was surprised when he excelled as the top student during his Parachute training this year.

"Sapper Watson's physical prowess was founded on a character of immense strength and whilst his natural talent always shone through, it was always with great modesty and good humour; such qualities won him tremendous respect from all whom he served with.

"Sapper Watson worked selflessly on the most demanding of tasks; working to liberate Afghanistan from the threat of IEDs. In doing so, he paid the ultimate price - his sacrifice will not be forgotten."

Lieutenant Colonel Nick Kitson, Commanding Officer 3 RIFLES Battle Group, said:
"In the time he had been with the Battle Group, Sapper David Watson had made a significant contribution to our efforts to provide security to the local population here in Sangin.

"With his close-knit team he had been involved in a large number of operations to deny insurgents the use of weapons caches, firing points and munitions in the ongoing fight against improvised explosive devices.

"Sapper Watson's loss is a tragedy but we are at least comforted by the fact that he died in the finest traditions of his regiment, providing security for one of our outlying patrol bases.

"He will be missed by the Battle Group and our thoughts and prayers are with his team, his friends but above all his family at this most difficult of times."

Major Richard Hawkins Royal Engineers, Officer Commanding 49 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), said:

"To be so highly thought of in a Squadron of so many talented and professional soldiers, is an indication of just how exceptional Sapper Dave Watson was, both as a soldier and a friend to many.

"Men of his high calibre can often be arrogant; Sapper Watson was anything but. A real team player, he helped out whenever he could and carried himself with a quiet confidence that was humbling given his obvious ability.

"Sapper Watson's vital work clearing mines and unexploded bombs throughout Helmand Province has undoubtedly saved the lives of countless soldiers and local civilians. No other job more directly represents the commitment of the British Army to ISAF's mission in creating a safer environment for the people of Afghanistan and he was immensely proud of his role.

"Sapper Watson's death is a tragic loss to his family, friends and brothers in arms, but it has also strengthened the Squadron's resolve to finish the job in hand. It was an honour to have served on operations with Sapper Watson and he will never be forgotten."

Lieutenant Lee Thornhill Royal Engineers, Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group Bomb Disposal Officer and 1 Troop Commander:

"Sapper David Watson was a true soldier. On a recent pre Junior Non Commissioned Officer Cadre he gained the nickname 'PAM Head' such was his capacity to absorb and recall the information he was being taught.

"But he wasn't the kind of soldier who was satisfied with just the lesson and always wanted to know the 'whys and the hows?'. As his Troop Commander, I could not have asked for any more of him. He was a model Sapper and was most certainly destined for great things.

"He had already 'smashed' two arduous courses and had been awarded top student on Pegasus Company such was his ability and determination. He had gained the nickname 'The Leg' as his capacity for running was unsurpassed.

"Sapper Watson was a traveller at heart and loved to share stories of his trips to Australia and Thailand.

"No doubt the boys will raise a number of glasses in memory of 'The Leg' when they take their leave. He was a rare breed - the type of man who considered nothing too demanding or tough.

"He feared no challenge. 1 Airborne Troop and 49 Field Squadron (EOD) will be a lesser place without him.

Captain Gareth T Bateman RE, Second-in-Command 49 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal):

"Simply unstoppable, Sapper Watson was an inspirational soldier.

"His tremendous physical ability was matched by a terrific mental capacity, a combination that was fast carving out a very promising career.

"His death is a tragic loss both to the Counter IED Task Force and to 33 Engineer Regiment but it has galvanised our will to push on with our task and we will take our inspiration to continue from the example that he set."

Sergeant Dave Hird, Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group, his colleague said:

"The future of my Corps has been denied a real star. "The Leg" (because his were freakishly long and he ran like the wind!) came to 1 (Airborne) Troop, after a short time at 24 Commando Engineer Regt where he had passed the All Arms Commando Course.

"Without much chance for hesitation or protest he was loaded straight on to P Company in order to be suitably qualified to wear the Maroon Beret.

"He came away with the Top Student award! His size and physical prowess were so immense his potential was seemingly limitless.

"It would have been very easy for Dave to get a big head and carried away with his achievements to date, but the measure of the man was his incredible humility.

"He never saw anything as a task beneath him and never hesitated in anything that was asked of him by anyone.

"He is a huge credit to his family and parents and should be held as the measure of what "the

youth of today" can actually achieve. Dave Watson will not be forgotten amongst his Airborne and Commando Bomb Disposal brothers."

Lance Corporal Ellis Acaster, Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group, his friend and colleague said of him:

"The very first moment I met him I knew he was an absolute machine. We did the Commando Course together and Dave was one those blokes everyone wanted to be.

"I remember Dave for many things but for me it was the nine mile speed march on our course, he cared more about the other blokes than he ever did for himself.

"The Army was made for him; he had achieved so much in such a short time, more than some in a career. Dave 'The Leg' Watson, Commando, Para, 'Machine' and friend - Always in our thoughts."

Lance Corporal Charles Best, Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group, – friend and colleague:

"Sapper David Watson, 'The Leg', was probably one of the most professional and fittest soldiers I have met to date.

"I really got to know this huge structure of a man when we completed P Company together. He was always willing to do anything for anyone, even if he was already busy with other tasks.

"With a bad knee injury from Pre Para, he just worked harder and was rewarded with the Top Student on our course, breaking the existing record for points scored.

"You made such an impact on my life in such a short space of time, it is an honour to have been your friend and to have served with you, my thoughts are with your family and friends, take it easy mate."

Sapper Stu Little, Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group, – friend and colleague:

"Dave 'The Leg' Watson had many moments of distinction in his short time with us, but this one sticks in my mind the most.

"After successful completion of P Company, the blokes who had passed were taken down town to take part in a time honoured ritual. 2 Chicken Phal's were ordered and Dave and Besty commenced eating. He destroyed it in seconds with his typical no fuss manner whilst Besty struggled in agony. True to the spirit of the man he took the remainder of Besty's Phal and smashed that down as well.

"Nothing you can say or write will be able to justify how good a soldier he was and how much he was one of the lads. We will all miss you Dave and we will always remember you."