

Sapper William Blanchard



Sapper Blanchard, aged 39, from Gosport in Hampshire, joined 221 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), part of 101 (City of London) Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), in 2007. He completed his basic training and then his elementary explosive ordnance disposal course before volunteering for mobilisation in 2010.

Once mobilised he joined 61 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) for mission specific training in Woodbridge before deployment. A friendly, well-considered and down to earth individual, he was the cornerstone of the reservist element within the Task Force.

He aspired to attempt officer selection on completion of his operational service and was already showing many of the hallmarks of a great leader.

A radiation protection officer by profession, he gained a double honours degree in Chemistry with Organic Chemistry and a Masters in Biomedical Pharmacology at the University of Southampton.

He leaves behind a large family including his wife, Suzanne Blanchard, and his children, Tom and Lucy Rees-Blanchard, his father, The Reverend Canon Lawrence Blanchard, and six brothers, Tom, Dan and Ned Blanchard and John, Chris and Shane Sargeant.

Sapper Blanchard's wife, Mrs Suzanne Blanchard, said:

"Will was a wonderful husband, son, brother, father, brother-in-law, son-in-law and friend. Sorely missed, always in our hearts, never forgotten by his devastated family, friends and colleagues and his beloved wife."

Lieutenant Colonel Mark Davis GM RLC, Commanding Officer Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Task Force, said:

"Sapper Blanchard was a father figure to the younger elements of the squadron. He was always concerned with their development and welfare, always displaying an interest in what they were doing and always keeping them informed – he was the consummate professional and it was not for nothing that he was known as the 'Colonel'!

"He was a perfectionist but one who had endless patience with his fellow soldiers, he was both impeccable and irreplaceable; people like Sapper Blanchard only come along once in a blue moon.

"Sapper Blanchard brought a wealth of knowledge and experience from his civilian employment into the Territorial Army and onwards into the C-IED Task Force; I clearly remember his unique brand of intellectual humour and his ability to 'read' the bigger picture which enabled him to place his vital contribution into context.

"He had a laid back approach and oozed confidence which was delivered with inner steel.

"He was a widely loved character who kept others going in times of adversity with his capacity to relate to people, to spread his knowledge and to care for them, and of course, he often made them step back in amazement with his enthusiasm for detail, be it reading instruction manuals or field testing the latest piece of EOD equipment to ensure that it 'did what it said on the tin'!

"Our loss runs exceptionally deep; Sapper Blanchard has left a palpable void within the C-IED Task Force; he was a brave and selfless soldier who took time out from his civilian employment to commit himself to our country and to the future of Afghanistan.

"He was always talking about his family and made his deep affection for them known to all. The heartfelt wishes, thoughts and prayers of the entire C-IED Task Force go out to his wife, Suzanne, his children, father and brothers at this painfully difficult time."

Lieutenant Colonel Mark Budden MBE RE, Commanding Officer 101 (City Of London) Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), said:

"The loss of Sapper William Blanchard has shaken the regiment deeply – my heartfelt condolences go out to Sapper Blanchard's wife, children, parents and friends. An exceptional soldier, he was a highly committed and professional member of 101 Engr Regt (EOD).

"His dedication to the Territorial Army, to his training and his desire to deploy on operations was an example to all those in his Squadron and Regiment. He was a role model to all that knew him.

"Sapper Blanchard will be sorely missed, but always remembered, by all ranks in 101 Engr Regt (EOD)."

Major Rod Brown, Officer Commanding 61 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), said:

"Sapper William Blanchard epitomises the strength that the mobilised Territorial Army bring to the operational theatre.

"An individual with a unique skill set, limitless enthusiasm and experience uncommon of his rank. I found the presence of the towering Sapper immediately consoling; he was able to engage with all levels of command, and drew the best from his team only resting once he knew that he had done all he physically could.

"Despite being relatively new to Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Will's quest for perfection pulled his team together, making them one of the most effective Destroy teams in the task force, and my first choice for some of the more challenging tasks.

"At times his foresight and clarity of thought were so impeccable he would have made a creditable member of my command team, he truly was an officer in the making.

"Despite his clear potential for a commission he was unequivocally focussed on the task in hand, he maintained a tangible desire to make a difference and was a leading light in difficult times.

"Will's contribution to making Afghanistan a safer place will not be forgotten by those of us that have known him.

"A genuine, widely respected and deeply valued member of the team, his loss is heart wrenching for those of us in his Squadron, and I cannot comprehend the grief his family must now be suffering.

"My most sincere condolences go to his wife, Suzanne, his children, Tom and Lucy, his father, Lawrence, and his brothers, Tom, Dan, Ned, John, Chris and Shane."

Major Caroline Eyre, Officer Commanding 221 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), said:

"Sapper William Blanchard had been a member of 221 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers) for three years and was a highly professional and committed member of the Squadron.

"He travelled a considerable distance from his home in Portsmouth to the Territorial Army Centre in Rochester in order to attend training, setting an example of dedication to his fellow Sappers.

"Keen to deploy on operations, he undertook the training required to be part of a Conventional Munitions Disposal Team at the earliest opportunity.

"Sapper Blanchard was a dependable and mature individual who could be relied upon to undertake his role in a conscientious manner and was due to attend the Potential Non-Commissioned Officer Cadre for promotion to Lance Corporal on his return from Operation

HERRICK.

"His quiet yet friendly manner ensured that Sapper Blanchard was well liked by all ranks and he had many close friends in the Squadron who will miss him dearly. He was one of our own and he will never be forgotten.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who were close to him; his family, his friends and his team members."

Captain Andy Abbott, Team Commander and Bomb Disposal Officer 221 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), said:

"I first met Will when I was the Sergeant Major Instructor in the Regiment in charge of recruiting. Will struck me then as an extremely intelligent, clever man.

"He was keen to learn from the outset as a recruit and again after being posted into his troop. He should have gone for Officer Cadet selection but wanted to get experience as a Sapper first.

"Our paths crossed again when I was instructing on his EOD course, again he would listen intently to the lectures and then come and track me down at the end and ask more questions.

"Over the past months whilst training for this deployment, our small team has gelled and Will was an integral part of this team.

"Always asking questions, he admitted to me that he couldn't help but think about everything he'd done, trying to improve. This, he told me was to the annoyance of his wife Sue.

"He would come up with some crazy ideas, but annoyingly most of the time they worked!

"A quiet man who could never be rushed, he loved his cup of tea in the morning and would not start work without it. He had become a good friend to me and Corporal Tony Field, helping Tony to write his diary and letters. We would sit down most days and chew the fat, talking about politics, work and me telling him about my holidays, trying to persuade him to take Sue to the Maldives when we got back.

"He recently missed his second wedding anniversary because he was out here.

"The day of his anniversary the phones were off-line during the day, so he stayed up until late that night hoping for them to come on-line so that he could speak to Sue on their special day.

"His face was beaming when he came back to the room because he had managed to get hold of her.

"A thoroughly lovely, thoughtful man who will be sorely missed by all. Cruelly and tragically taken from us, my thoughts and prayers go out to his family, friends and most of all, his wife, Suzanne."

Captain Tom Roach, 221 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), said:

"Sapper Blanchard, came to 221 Field Squadron with a mission from the start. He wanted to support his Country on operations and was determined to reach his goal as soon as he could. Sapper Blanchard worked like a demon to achieve his aim, but simply revelled in the build up to operations.

"He was an outstanding soldier of the highest calibre. He was respected by everyone that knew him because he was professional in every aspect of his soldiering. He will be truly missed by all that came to know him, no matter how short that time was. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this very, very sad time. Quis Seperabit."

Captain Ken Jones, Second in Command 221 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), said:

"I had the honour and the pleasure to know William. The Squadron and I were devastated to hear about his tragic death on Saturday.

"I had the greatest respect for William and will miss him greatly. His generous nature and remarkable sense of humour was an example to others. William was a big man with a big heart; the squadron's gentle giant. We will always remember him.

"His family are in my thoughts and prayers. God bless you at this time."

Warrant Officer Class 2 (Squadron Sergeant Major) Reyhan Fadil, said:

"Everything about William was big, he was a big man. Had a big brain, always put in a big effort. He also had a big smile, and of course had a big heart.

"He was very well liked, was a very popular soldier, very well respected, and everyone's friend.

"Now he's moved on, he will leave a big void. Rest in peace big man."

Quarter Master Sergeant Instructor Matthew Loughrey, 1 Troop Commander, said:

"Will had been with 1 Troop, 221 Field Squadron for several years and was trained as a member of the Bomb Disposal Team prior to his deployment to Afghanistan.

"I would describe Will as a gentle giant who led a private life; popular and well respected with both fellow sappers and the troop management. Will was a highly intelligent, mature and wise man who would always give you an educated opinion.

"Always systematic in his approach and if facing a problem or given a challenge, he would always come up with a solution. Living in Portsmouth, Will would often do a 4 hour round trip to parade on a Tuesday evening showing true dedication and commitment to the Squadron and Territorial Army.

"Ready to help or give worldly advice to anyone, Will was a true professional who looked forward to his deployment and relished the opportunity to gain experience.

"A tragic loss, he will be greatly missed by his team and all in the Squadron, Regiment and Corps."

Sergeant Ian Williamson, Bomb Disposal Officer 579 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), said:

"I first met Will on a TA training weekend when I taught him Battlefield First Aid. We met on subsequent weekends, on exercise, and I taught him on his Elementary Explosive Ordnance Disposal course before mobilisation.

"He was a very intelligent man, always attentive and ready with a question. He would seek you out after a lesson just to reconfirm everything you had covered.

"Will always had time for his mates, always ready to socialise over a cup of tea and help with advice on computers.

"He got the nickname 'the Colonel' because being meticulous in everything he did could be exasperating.

"He would check up on everything that was arranged, then read it back to you like battle orders. We laughed and took the mickey but he'll be missed, a thoroughly nice bloke."

Corporal Adetokanbo Adefuye, friend and fellow Explosive Ordnance Disposal operator, 221 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), said:

"Will, words cannot express what you mean to us. You loved your family, cared for your friends and colleagues and took pride, perfection, joy and responsibility in everything you did.

"You will be sorely missed by all of us; your friends, Squadron, Regiment and most importantly your much loved family.

"Goodnight pal and may your gentle soul rest in peace."

Lance Corporal Aaron Mitchell, friend and fellow Explosive Ordnance Disposal operator, 221 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), said:

"I have known Will for several years working together in our TA unit, 221 Field Squadron Royal Engineers (EOD); he was always hard working and professional in everything he did.

"We both mobilised for Operation HERRICK 13 as part of the Counter IED Task Force and it was when we began pre-deployment training together, spending every day practically living in each others' pockets, that I realised how hard he worked at every job to give the best of his ability.

"He was friendly, supportive and always put others first. Will's sense of humour was a bit bizarre at first but that was what made him the character he was.

"He will be dearly missed and has done his country proud. My thoughts go out to his family after such a loss. I will miss you buddy."

Lance Corporal Mitchell Rix, friend and fellow Explosive Ordnance Disposal operator, 221 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), said:

"'The Colonel' to his friends but to those in charge Sapper William Blanchard, the only Sapper to be paid more than the Colonel. He was called the Colonel because of his ability to brief and debrief any rank.

"This was due to his civvy job; he just forgot he was not in charge. But this made him the most fastidious person I have ever met. If there was something geeky you needed to know he was the man to go to.

"He needed to know the ins and outs of everything before he set about doing anything.

"Will was a straight up person, more of the officer type, he did not tolerate fools but he never offended people in the same regard; he was one of life's genuine people.

"I have learned this over the year or so that I have known Will, and in the last six months I have spent more time and gone out for more meals with him than with my wife.

"I can say he was out here for his own reasons which were the love and enthusiasm of the job he was doing. He was a life friend to me, a bond that cannot be broken and will be dearly missed by myself and everyone he had touched in his life."

Sapper Christian Mulrooney, friend and Royal Engineers Search Team member, 217 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers), said:

"In six months I have befriended one of the best Sappers I've known in almost six years of service. Will, as he would have us know him, was a man of great character and strength, who showed endless patience to all around him.

"From him I have learned so much and am heart broken he has been taken from us all so suddenly.

"I feel for all who knew him as they have lost someone who cannot and will never be replaced.

"If I were to detail all his strengths I would run out of time, I simply cannot impress upon you how great a man he was.

"Ages will pass before I can close this wound his death has inflicted upon me. Will, you will not be forgotten."