

RIFLEMAN SHELDON LEE JORDAN STEEL KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

Rifleman Sheldon Steel, of the 5th Battalion The Rifles was killed on the 27th November 2011. He was taking part in a foot patrol to disrupt insurgent freedom of movement and to reassure the local population in Babaji in the Lashkah Gah district which is in the Nahr-e Saraj (S) area of operations. He was airlifted to the field hospital at Camp Bastion where he was declared killed in action.

Rifleman Sheldon Lee Jordan Steel (20) from Leeds joined the Army in November 2009, and underwent his combat training at the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick, North Yorkshire. Rifleman Steel passed out of basic training in April 2010 and shortly afterwards joined 5th Battalion The Rifles, based in Paderborn, Germany.

During his time with the Battalion, Rifleman Steel had achieved a great deal. He arrived at a busy time in the Battalion's calendar and was immediately thrust into further training, learning the intricacies of the Warrior armoured fighting vehicle, while developing the closest of bonds with those whom he would later deploy to Afghanistan with. This training culminated in a six-week, vehicle-mounted exercise in Canada in late 2010. Throughout this testing period, Rifleman Steel demonstrated that he was quickly developing into a skilled, robust and intelligent soldier, in keeping with the Regiment's tradition of the 'thinking, fighting Rifleman'. This early promise was honed through Afghanistan pre-deployment training in the first half of 2011. Rifleman Steel's skills as a marksman, coupled with his mature approach and calm, focused demeanour were harnessed on the Sharp Shooters' course, which he passed with ease. A highly professional soldier he had proven to be one of the stars of his company. He was focused on his career, rightly ambitious, and showed great promise.

He leaves behind his mother Victoria; his sisters Cody and Carys and brother Kameron. The family said: "Sheldon was loving, caring and affectionate with his family and we all heard from him regularly. He loved being in the Army from when he was in the Army Cadets to joining 5 Rifles. He was very fit and ran a marathon in June this year. He won prizes for his soldiering both in training and in a Regimental competition. He had a good sense of humour and frequently joked with us all. He was a big lad - all 6 foot 4 in of him - with a big heart. His Nanas had to stand on the wall outside the house to kiss him "Goodbye". Words cannot explain how much he will be missed by us all.

We have already received a lot of support from family, friends and work colleagues and we really appreciate this. "Tribute from Ashleigh Craig, Adam Thomas, Paul Bone and Sam Hall - all former Army Cadets with 'C' Company Yorkshire North and West Army Cadet Force and friends of Sheldon: "Sheldon was a good mate and we couldn't have wished for a better friend. He was always ready for a laugh. He was so keen to better himself and be good at his job. He was kind and had a very honest approach to life. Every time he came back on leave he went mad on fitness and part of him was back with the Regiment. He was so brave and we are all so proud of him. We will miss him a lot."

Lieutenant Colonel Tom Copinger-Symes, Commanding Officer, 5th Battalion the Rifles, Combined Force Nahr-e Saraj (South), said: "Rifleman Sheldon Steel was the essence of a 'Delta Dog', as the members of D Company 5 RIFLES are known. As a club within a club, the Delta Dogs have a particularly special identity in our Battalion and Rifleman Steel was immensely proud of that identity. And so he should have been, because he was, and will remain until next year, the 'Top Dog' - which is to say the winner of D Company's annual competition to find their best Rifleman.

"Rifleman Steel won this accolade in the last few weeks before deploying to Helmand, in an arduous and hard-fought contest that fully stretched the Riflemen's mental and physical capacities. As a result he

was afforded the honour of sitting at the centre of the top table at the formal 'Dog's Dinner' - a full-on Regimental Dinner for all members of the Company, surrounded with Regimental Silver from the Officers' and Serjeants' Messes and entertained by the Battalion's Buglers. None of us will ever forget his humble and self-effacing delight that night, mingled with a touch of embarrassment, at finding himself at the centre of such attention. He truly was a special blend of physical robustness, sharp intellect, old-fashioned politeness, and natural leadership flair - all underscored by a quiet confidence and understated ambition. Unquestionably a rising star, unsurprisingly excelling on operations in Afghanistan, and clearly destined for the Corporals' Mess following this tour, Rifleman Steel had made his mark across the Battalion in double quick time. His death in an IED blast has taken one of our very best and we will be so much the poorer for his loss. Nevertheless, we have been enriched by his presence amongst us, his professionalism, and his passion for our chosen career. He now joins the list of legends who have, by their hard work and sacrifice, made progress in this part of Afghanistan ever more attainable. And the manner of his passing reminds us, in the words of the Grace spoken at his Dog's Dinner, that 'it is not the size of the dog in the fight; but rather the size of the fight in the dog'. As a Rifleman, as a brother-in-arms, he will never be forgotten.

The thoughts and prayers of every member of 5 RIFLES Battlegroup now turn to his mother Victoria, his sisters Cody and Carys, and his brother Kameron, as well as his wider family and friends.

Major Matt Baker, Officer Commanding D Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles, said: "Rifleman Steel was quite genuinely the best Rifleman in my Company and the one with the greatest potential. He excelled at everything he did. A proud Yorkshireman, he was forthright and independent, a real thinking Rifleman. He won D Company's Top Dog competition (to identify the top Rifleman in the Company) back in September and would have attended a JNCO cadre on his return. He will be sadly missed by us all, but especially his mates in 14 Platoon. Our thoughts are with his mother, his sisters and his brother."

Warrant Officer Class Two Owen Mitchell, Company Serjeant Major, D Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles, said: "Rifleman Steel was one of the best Riflemen I have ever served with. He showed great potential and I know would have made a very capable Junior Non-Commissioned Officer. Rifleman Steel took pride in every task that was given to him. He was diligent, enthusiastic and a pleasure to work with. Rifleman Steel was a true Top Dog of Delta Company, he will be sadly missed by all of D Company and myself."

Second Lieutenant Allan Tuffin, Officer Commanding, 14 Platoon, D Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles, said: "Very few Riflemen could match the potential that was so clearly seen in Rifleman Steel. He was dedicated to his work and more focused on his career than any Rifleman I know. Despite always setting his sights high I am certain that he had what it would take to achieve all of his aspirations and I know that he would have gone far. He was a strong Rifleman; physically, in his heart and in his character. He was a loyal friend, an exceptional soldier and an integral member of the platoon. In him could be seen all the qualities of a professional thinking Rifleman. I could not have wished for nor imagined a better soldier to have had the privilege to command."

The impact of his passing will be great on the Platoon but I know his memory will serve to inspire all of us to carry on in the way that he always did. He set an example to those who were privileged enough to ever go on patrol with him, and we will remember him in all that we do. He will be greatly missed, but he will always live on in our thoughts."

Serjeant Richard Duggan, 14 Platoon, D Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles, said: "I have had the privilege of being Rifleman Steel's Platoon Serjeant since he joined the Battalion, in

which time he has proved himself in every way. Rifleman Steel was truly an outstanding Rifleman. He gave 100% in all that he did, and would always achieve to the very best standard. Rifleman Steel was a soldier who had aspirations of doing great things and reaching high places. With his determination and ability I know that he would have achieved them."

"The Platoon has lost a brother and the Rifles have lost one of their best Riflemen. At this time our thoughts are with his family, but he will remain in the hearts of everyone who was lucky enough to know him. RIP, Top Dog."

Lance Corporal Luke Addyman, 14 Platoon, D Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles, said:

"Sheldon was an amazing soldier. It was a great honour to know him and a privilege to call him a friend. He was born to be a soldier and was the best Rifleman in D Company. Losing him has hurt us all within the Platoon as he was loved by all as a brother. God bless, forever in our hearts. 'Swift and Bold' Steely."

Lance Corporal Adam Booth, 14 Platoon, D Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles, said:

"Steely was an exceptional soldier, fit robust and a true athlete. As strong as an ox, with a heart of gold, he always helped the other Riflemen in the Platoon. We have lost one of, if not the best, Riflemen in the Company. He was a natural soldier and would have made a great Non-Commissioned Officer. Steely, I hope you rest in peace mate. 'Swift and Bold'."

Rifleman Rikki McCreight, 14 Platoon, D Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles, said:

"Sheldon was a good friend. I always enjoyed spending time with him - swimming, water skiing or just hanging out, talking and watching movies. He was a top soldier, he was fit and he knew all there was to know about being a soldier. I could always go to him for advice. He was ambitious and he had his career planned out. He will be missed and I'll always remember him."

Rifleman Tony Glancy, 14 Platoon, D Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles, said:

"He had true grit and determination. He was a friend, a man and a soldier. I will always remember him".