

Captain Mark Hale
The 2nd Battalion The Rifles

Killed in action 13th August 2009

Captain Mark Hale was born on 9th April 1967 in Bournemouth. He joined the Army in 1983, aged 16, as a Junior Leader and embarked on an exceptional career with the Devonshire & Dorset Regiment that took him on operations to Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Iraq and then, with 2nd Battalion The Rifles, to Afghanistan. One of the outstanding soldiers of his generation, he found his calling in the Reconnaissance Platoon, where he spent much of his career. He promoted to Company Serjeant

Major in London on ceremonial duties and then had a brief spell as Regimental Serjeant Major. Selected for a commission, he managed the careers of almost 1000 soldiers in the 1st Battalion The Rifles as four regiments merged to form The Rifles in 2007. He then moved to the 2nd Battalion as the Motor Transport Officer and then became the Battle Group Logistics Officer for operations in Afghanistan this summer. Capt Hale was fiercely fit; he loved cycling, rowing and rugby. He was a genuine thinker, had studied at the Open University for a degree and then took a Masters in Psychology. He was a devoted husband adored by his wife Brenda and a loving and exceptional father to his 2 daughters. He died on 13th August 2009 in an IED explosion helping an injured soldier to safety whilst on patrol near Sangin.

Lieutenant Colonel Rob Thomson MBE, Commanding Officer 2 RIFLES Battle Group:

"It is almost impossible to know where to start when writing a tribute to a man as brave, huge and full-on as Mark Hale. He oozed quality, humanity and had a tremendous and mischievous sense of fun, which frequently lightened the load of this extraordinary tour.

"He was 'undentable' and we in 2 Rifles have invented this new word in honour of Mark. Nothing phased him, however demanding the situation, and his ability to absorb work, pressure and other people's worries was genuinely legendary. That is what 'undentable' now means.

"As the Battle Group's Logistics Officer, Mark has been supreme on this complex, intense and dangerous tour. He sorted out big issues easily and with no fuss and he dealt with a host of annoying, CO type questions of detail, with enviable patience. I knew when a task had his name ascribed to it that that task was as good as done already. I kept giving him more work and he kept on delivering. He has been superb counsel to me and, much more importantly, to countless Riflemen who have hunted him out for a chat. On the ground, he breathed courage into the platoons he served alongside. Mark was an outstanding Rifleman - fiercely intelligent, always creating novel options, often well outside his logistic lane, and committed like no other. It is entirely typical of this man that he died whilst helping to evacuate wounded soldiers. Mark understood the importance and the urgency of the work in this place in spades - one could see

that from the amount he crammed into each day. But he was more than just an extraordinary professional, he was a truly great man, a devoted husband and an adored father. He had a strong Christian faith, even standing in as the Padre for one of our church services here in Sangin. Mark wasn't a fifth gear man, he was a sixth gear merchant. Us mortals could rarely keep up. When we rowed on ergo machines from Sangin to Pegasus Bridge in April, May and June to raise money for wounded soldiers, he led the way; on one inhuman session, he rowed 42,000 metres. To him, it was just another challenge but it gives you a feel for the mark of the man.

"The hole he has left in our lives is enormous but we know that our grief is nothing compared to what his dear, beloved family is going through. But this should be some comfort. Mark Hale, a man of true Christian faith, died doing a job he loved and was embarked on a mission that has national levels of importance and urgency. Our hearts go out to his family - we are holding them very close in our prayers. Mark, I promise you that your baton here has not been dropped - it is held high."

Lieutenant Colonel Rupert Jones MBE, Commanding Officer 4 RIFLES (a former Reconnaissance Platoon Commander with Captain Hale):

"Mark was a legend - a giant of a man in every sense of the word. Honourable, intelligent, utterly professional and loyal. He has touched the lives of so many people over his 20 plus years service and there will be so very many people in the West Country and way beyond who will be absolutely devastated that a man of such stature has fallen. He had that air of self-confidence, born of quality, which the very finest soldiers have. You always felt that he was challenging you. However, he was most certainly not arrogant. Hard to his core, he was immensely fit, strong and competitive, not least on the rugby field where his gentle manner was discarded. Frankly, he terrified junior officers in his younger days by his presence - God only knows what young Privates made of him. I had the honour to command him in the Recce Platoon in Bosnia in 1995, during what was a highly dynamic tour - he was immense. It was the most star studded platoon I have ever come across, but Mark was a towering presence. Always challenging to make sure that things were absolutely right, he was a complete rock when the chips were down. However, it is his wonderfully warm character that I will remember most, always a big smile on his face, he seemed to almost envelop you with his character and presence - he genuinely had an aura about him. It seems inconceivable that he has gone."

Major Darren Denning, Chief of Staff 2 RIFLES Battle Group:

"I don't have worries and I don't believe in crises", that was the Mark Hale approach. He was better read, better informed, more articulate and more astute than all of us. Easy, common-sense solutions to difficult problems were his trademark and he saved us all hours of fruitless labour by being so sharp. He knew just how far to push it and would only ever over-step the mark knowingly and armed with an instantly forgivable grin. Mark was so well-tuned, always read the mood and was genuinely witty. He could be ever-so-slightly sarcastic - unless he meant it and then he did sarcasm really really well.

"What I will miss most is his presence. This is said of many, but Mark Hale did fill a room and

proved that you didn't have to be noisy to do so. He cared for his people and such was the respect in which he was held, that formality was never needed in his command. Mark was a universally popular and well-loved Rifleman - full stop.

"I, and countless others, sought his opinion on almost everything. His sage advice was always on the money and we loved the way he put his arms around those having a harder time of it. Some people show an interest to be seen to do so, Mark just cared. Such good companionship is so hard to find and in a difficult place, in difficult times he was an anchor point to many. The desk, he hated with a passion, is now empty in front of us and there is an enormous void in the Battle Group. This really hurts, but is of no comparison with the grief Mark's beloved family will feel. Mark loved them deeply and they were always at the forefront of his mind. They are now held close in our collective thoughts and prayers."

Major Mark Owen, Quartermaster 2 RIFLES Battle Group:

"Mark was a giant man with a giant personality, his sharp sense of humour was a real joy to be around. He had that magic touch of adding calm and a sense of perspective whilst all around would be losing their head. I recall in Iraq when he decided that it wasn't necessary to wash his hair, 'it would clean itself'. Of course he was right, but the first few weeks were smelly while his hair developed its self-cleaning properties. Once I tried to match him on a bike, he was 14 hours into a 24 marathon, I was wrong to try, as ever he proved too strong. I miss him as will countless others. My thoughts and prayers at this unimaginably painful time are with Brenda and his 2 daughters."

Major Karl Hickman, Officer Commanding A Company 2 RIFLES Battle Group:

"Mark Hale was the type of guy that you would always want next to you on patrol. Big in stature, both physically and in terms of personality, he was utterly unflappable and always dismissed any pressure or difficulty with his easy sense of humour and calming presence. He was also always there when you needed him, putting others first and ensuring the success of the mission. Mark was one of the great men of the Battalion and it was a tremendous privilege to have served with him."

Major Marc Briggs, Officer Commanding Headquarter Company 2 RIFLES Battle Group:

"Physical strength, compassion and a wicked sense of humour, Mark was one of the great men of the Battalion. He would never slow, whether training in the gym at midnight as that was the only time left in the day or taking every opportunity to support the Riflemen on patrol despite having a demanding job in the HQ. Mark died as a Rifleman on patrol in the most demanding of operational environments. He leaves a large hole with me and in the Battalion. It is an absolute pleasure to have known him."

Major Will Strickland, Deputy Chief of Staff 19 Light Brigade:

"Over the last year we spent most Thursday nights and Sunday afternoons rowing together on the Lagan. Other than us, we had a particularly Irish and civvie boat, to which he always

provided much needed calm and understated control. He was outstandingly fit, and was certainly the powerhouse of our boat. His humour, selflessness, and his obvious close orientation to family life - his girls rowed at the Belfast Boat Club as well - endeared him to the whole club. The largely Irish team were and are very protective of both of us, and have been constantly emailing whilst we have been away. We were both looking forward to returning to compete, and he had been constantly training in Sangin in preparation. I will personally think of him every time I go out on the water, as I am sure the rest of the boat will. There will equally be a real sense of loss when I look at the desk he was meant to fill in the Brigade Headquarters for the next 2 years."

Captain Rupert Streatfeild, Operations Officer 2 RIFLES Battle Group:

"Mark was the heart of 2 RIFLES, a giant of a man, both physically and in character. His calm appearance contrasted with a fierce determination to support all he knew; whether it be his family, fellow Riflemen or even team mates on a rugby pitch. As a father, he was deeply proud of his daughters, as a soldier he was deeply paternal towards his men. His strong and caring nature came from his close faith and relationship with God. Having prayed together, he shared both the joys and frustrations of life out here. He wouldn't ask anyone to do a task he wasn't willing to do himself, a fact widely acknowledged by all who knew him and, as such, sought to live out the example of Christ. A legend of a man who will be sorely missed by all."

Lieutenant Hannah Keenan, Adjutant General's Corps Detachment Commander 2 RIFLES Battle Group:

"Mark was a father figure to the whole Battle Group, he cared deeply for everyone here and always provided morale whatever the situation. He died doing the job he loved; for no one else does the phrase 'Soldier First' fit better. He was out to understand exactly what the guys on the ground were going through, so he could empathise as well as sympathise.

"A huge void has been left, but we will make him proud, and get on with the task at hand, exactly as he would have done. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his beloved wife Brenda and his daughters, who have lost a truly special man."