

1ST BATTALION, THE MERCIAN REGIMENT
Pte Thomas Sephton was 20 years old and from Warrington. He enlisted into the Army in July 2008 and joined the 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire) [1 MERCIAN] in January 2009 following the Combat Infantryman's Course in Catterick. He joined Mortar Platoon and served in the United Kingdom, The Falkland Islands and Kenya, and on operations in Afghanistan.
On the morning of the Sunday 4 July 2010, operating in a Rifle Platoon, Pte Sephton deployed from Patrol Base Malvern tasked with providing flank protection to an IED clearance operation. Whilst clearing a route for his section he was caught in an IED blast and seriously wounded. Pte Sephton was extracted by helicopter to Bastion Role 3 Hospital and then flown to the UK. On the afternoon of the 5 July 2010, with his family present, the decision was taken to switch off his life support machine and he died of his wounds.

The family of Pte Thomas Sephton have made the following statement:
"Tom meant the world to everyone who knew him. We are so very proud of our brave soldier. He will be with us forever in our hearts."
Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Hadfield, Commanding Officer 1 MERCIAN, said:
"Private Tom Sephton joined the 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire) in January 2009, choosing to serve with the Mortar Platoon from the outset.
"He had been enthused by the nature of the Platoon, and he fitted in well from the very start, training with them in the Falkland Islands and Kenya, before deploying to Afghanistan.
"He was a hardworking man, always ready to volunteer for additional work or responsibility in order to improve the lot of others.
"He is remembered by his friends as a man who never complained, who just got on with the job, however difficult or unpleasant it was. This is probably the reason that he was often to be found at the head of patrols, searching for IEDs that would threaten them.
"He was courageous and selfless to the last, placing himself in harm's way to save others. When he was mortally injured he was alongside his best friend Private Charlie Emina, and amongst his mates whom he did so much to help.
"Tom Sephton was not a particularly big man in terms of size, but he had a big heart, and was full of fun and energy. He was a keen rugby player and enjoyed playing on the wing for his Company, where his fitness and speed were more than a match for most.
"He punched above his weight in every way, whether militarily, in sporting activities or by just being a great friend and comrade. His obvious ability had been spotted, and he was due to attend a promotion course on return from Afghanistan.
"If any man lived the motto, 'Stand Firm Strike Hard', it was Tom Sephton. He will be missed deeply by the Mortar Platoon, and by the men of C Company to whom he was attached. The thoughts and prayers of the entire Battalion are with his family and friends at this most difficult of times."
Major Chris Wood, Officer Commanding C Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:
"Private Tom Sephton was caught in an explosion clearing a patrol base line to the north of Gereshk, Helmand province. He was part of an operation to reinforce the patrol base line allowing for greater security to be established among the villages of northern Gereshk.
"He was wounded as he deployed with his platoon to provide protection for the Improvised Explosive Device [IED] Task Force.
"Tom Sephton was one of the Company's finest soldiers. He was fit, robust and above all, fearless. I have a Battalion coin which was awarded by the Commanding Officer for acts of courage and selflessness that was awarded to Tom.
"He had, some weeks ago, identified a command wire which led to a donkey. The donkey had been tied to the ground and on its back was a large IED.

Despite the obscurity of a donkey-borne IED, Tom's vigilance and utter knowledge of the ground prevented certain loss of life, but thanks to Tom the only casualty was the donkey.

"I have not had the opportunity to give him the coin as he has been with his platoon on the Patrol Base Line providing security to the local population ever since.
"Tom was at the top of his game, a true soldier and a great friend. He will be sorely missed and our thoughts go out to his family and friends. Their loss is greatest. Tom lived tough and died a hero. He is constantly in our hearts and will never be forgotten, we will see you again."

Major Robin Barnbrook, Officer Command Support Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Private Sephton's tragic death will be keenly felt by every soldier in Support Company 1 MERCIAN. He was a bright and engaging soldier but more importantly, he was a genuine man who cared for his mates.

"Sefo was a key figure in the Mortar Platoon and did much to increase the Platoon's performance on the Battalion's weekly run - the Pearson Trophy. A true Mercian warrior, his sacrifice will not be forgotten and the thoughts of the men of Support Company are with his family and many friends at this most distressing of times."

Lieutenant Richard Sawyer, Officer Commanding 9 Platoon, C Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Private Tom Sephton was a mature soldier. His courage was unflinching regardless of danger. His natural size meant that he did not look like a rugby player but his speed and love for playing the game ensured that he was a talented player.

"On operations he proved to be an exceptional soldier. He took pride in being front-man of a platoon and he remained unflappable under pressure. His professional ability and calm nature saved the lives of colleagues on several occasions. He is a true hero.

"Rest in Peace Private Sephton."

Lt Alex Kersey, Officer Commanding 6 Platoon, C Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Having only spent two weeks on the ground with 6 Platoon, Private Sephton had already demonstrated several good qualities of a soldier. He led from the front in the most skilful and tactical way.

"He was the lead man of the lead section which cleared safe routes of IEDs for colleagues. In doing so he demonstrated immense courage and selflessness.

"A truly well liked and respected member of the platoon which had been at the forefront of an operation here in Helmand province. Private Sephton has left a lasting presence in the Platoon and our thoughts go out to his family and friends.

"His courage and professionalism was an example to all. He will be in our hearts and minds as we continue over here and will never be forgotten."

Lt David Payne, C Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Private Tom Sephton was one of the bravest soldiers I have ever met. As a leading member of the Mortar Platoon All Arms Search Team he constantly put himself in harm's way to protect other members of his team and platoon.

"He was an eternally happy young man, always engaged in banter with his Section Commander, Lance Corporal Marriot, and particularly his good friend Private Charlie Emina. He was also a great rugby league player who ran rings round me on more than one occasion when on the training field. His enthusiasm for the game reflects his attitude to all things in life.

"He will be sorely missed by all his friends here. Our prayers are with his family; I am sure they can take some solace in the fact that he saved the lives of others by giving his own. Sleep well now, I will never forget you."

Warrant Officer Class 2 Paul Morley, Mortar Platoon Second in Command, on behalf of the Mortar Platoon, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Tom Sephton joined the Mortar Platoon in January 2009. He immediately became part of the team and was very popular with everyone. He rose to the challenge of being a mortarman with glowing enthusiasm and a permanent smile. He was a true professional and dedicated to both his work and his friends.

"A keen sportsman, he

represented his Company at rugby, subsequently playing a key role within Support Company's trophy winning effort. At times he left a few Battalion rugby players a little red faced and more than surprised with his pace and skill.

"With his sparkling character he made socialising look easy and loved spending time with his friends ensuring a few 'quiet' drinks were never dull with Tom around.

"He was an excellent soldier and an even finer friend who met every challenge with vigour and a smile. He will be sadly missed but affectionately remembered by all that knew him. Rest in Peace."

Corporal John Devlin, Mortar Platoon, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Tom Sephton was an excellent soldier and an even better friend. He met any challenge with enthusiasm and hard work. His many qualities and strength of character made him very popular and he will be sadly missed and fondly remembered by all those that knew him. Rest in Peace."

Cpl Darren Lightfoot, Mortar Platoon, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"From the moment Sepho got to the Mortar Platoon, he was the life and soul of the platoon. He was always smiling, having a laugh and a joke about pretty much anything. It was an honour knowing him and he will be sadly missed. Sleep tight Sepho mate, I will never forget you."

LCpl Alan Redford and Pte Craig Biddle, Mortar Platoon, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"A few words about Tom Sephton aka Sepho. We first met Sepho two years ago when he joined the Mortar Platoon and was instantly liked. Sepho never needed telling to do stuff and was very hard working. He was always first to volunteer. He was small in size but made big mates quickly and he had a big heart.

"Our time knowing Sepho was a pleasure; we were like his big brothers in the Army, always giving him advice - mainly on girls.

"Before deploying to Afghanistan the platoon was invited to Sepho's birthday party where we met all of his family and friends, which was a really good night and a good send off for a small man. Sepho you are a big loss to the platoon, always loved and never forgotten. Love Reds and Bids."

LCpl James Johnson, Mortar Platoon, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Tom Sephton was a hero and a true friend. He was a great guy, always hard working with an excellent sense of humour. To us he was like a baby brother. Rest in Peace."

LCpl Steven Morrish, Pte Jonathan Charlesworth, Pte Colin Brown and Pte Steven Naylor, Mortar Platoon, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Sepho, we are sitting here wondering what to write as it is not something that we ever thought we would have to do. We just hope it does you justice.

"Our friend, you would always talk about your mum and family and we knew from the stories how much you loved them and our hearts and thoughts go out to them for their great loss. We know how much you loved your rugby and you would always argue the case that it is more skilful than football and it was a true man's game; that's why you played it.

"Since we got out here, you have always led from the front, whether it was for the Section or Company or coming forward to clear IEDs with Moz. You used to call him 'Jack' if he found it first, but you found more than your fair share. What is mad as we are writing this is the fact that we are smiling and laughing as people remember your stories.

"We always knew you were a ladies man even if some of your stories were farfetched. Sometimes you would show us evidence, but then we would speak to Charlie and his story would be completely different.

"There are so many things that need to be said, like how you were always willing to help anyone out, or how you would shout, 'Moz, get your fags out' after a fire fight, or how we would catch you wearing your softie over your body armour because you were cold.

"Whatever you did you had a cheeky smile on your face. We will miss you mate, a true hero and a true friend. Gone but NEVER forgotten."

Pte Charles Emina, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Sepho was my closest friend in the world; we were like brothers. He was always the life and soul wherever he went. He loved his

friends and family more than anything. He was always first out of the gate on patrol and had pride doing his job for his Country. He saved the lives of his section on two occasions and on that tragic day he saved my life and gave his own.

"He is a true hero to his friends, family and his country and as a Nation we owe him a debt of gratitude. I love him with all my heart and I will be lost without him. All my love goes to him and his family while he Rests in Peace."

Pte Jamie Dollery, Pte Laurie Cartwright, and Craftsman Carl Fletcher, C Company, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"We can say that from the day we met Sepho he was a top lad and a very good friend. From the first day that Tom came to the platoon he was instantly liked, quiet at first but soon came out of his shell and made an impact on everyone."

"At his first platoon function he was nicknamed 'Little Dolly' and that name stuck. To that end, Sepho mate, you were a brother to us and a friend to all."

"On his first mortar exercise he was Dolly's Number 2 and we could see that he was a grafter and a mortarman, even though he didn't have the build of one. Tom was one of the nicest blokes you could ever meet, with a heart of gold."

"He would do anything for you at the drop of a hat; he was strong minded and willed, a cracking soldier. Our thoughts go out to your family and friends at this time. As you roll up to the gates of St Peter, you can let him know that the Mortars have arrived. Today you are known as a soldier, tomorrow you will be known as a hero. Rest in Peace Tom, you will never be forgotten."

Members of C Company Mortar Section, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Sefo was one of the lads in the Mortar Platoon who was always up for a laugh. Smoked like Dot Cotton and drank like a fish but still one of the fittest lads in the platoon, which isn't exactly hard!"

"He always thought he was a John Travolta and a bit of a player which is something we'll all miss about him. Gone from our Platoon but not from our hearts. We are going to miss you Sefo lad."

Pte Manasseh Hayfron-Taylor, Mortar Platoon, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Tom Sephton you have left a big vacuum in my heart and life and I struggle to find the words to express how I am feeling; grief, pain and sadness all fall short. You have played a huge part in my life since our days in training, through to joining the Battalion and then into the Mortar Platoon; you will be fondly missed."

"We will all miss your strength, enthusiasm and camaraderie both socially and at work. You were a strong and cheerful friend with a bright future, which was cruelly and unfairly cut short."

"I will never forget the good times we shared and the memories we had together, and wish I could turn back the clock to see you again. The Almighty God has his own rest safely in his abode. Until we meet again, God be with you, and rest in peace my friend."

Pte Kevin Crouch and Pte Angus Connelly, Mortar Platoon, 1 MERCIAN, said:

"Tom Sephton was an excellent soldier, a true friend and a hero. He possessed a humour that inspired others and he will not be forgotten. It was an honour to have called him a friend and he will always be our hero. Rest in Peace."