

Lance Corporal Matthew Croucher, a Royal Marine reservist, has been awarded one of the highest gallantry medals, the George Cross. There are only 20 other living holders of this recognition of acts of heroism not in the face of the enemy.

(Alongside the Victoria Cross, the George Cross is the nation's highest bravery honour and is awarded for 'acts of the greatest heroism or of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger.'). He had thrown himself onto a booby trap grenade in Helmand, Afghanistan, to save his comrades.

Defence Viewpoints salutes the sung and unsung heroes, especially the fatalities, the injured and all who serve their country and pay a price. The Parliamentary Welcome Homes we report elsewhere are but a small recognition of bravery and sacrifice.

A full listing of those who have been killed during operations in Afghanistan can be found at <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/OperationsFactsheets/OperationsInAfghanistanBritishFatalities.htm>

Those killed during operations in Iraq (176 serving troops and MoD civilians) since March 2003 can be found at <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/OperationsFactsheets/OperationsInIraqBritishFatalities.htm>

Private Peter Cowton

Private Cowton was killed on 30th July 2008 in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

"Pte Peter Cowton was an experienced soldier and 9 Platoon's lead scout. He had served in Iraq as a reservist before joining 2 PARA last year and had already spent three months on operations against the Taliban near FOB GIBRALTAR, in the Musa Qal'eh Wadi and further north in the Upper Sangin valley. He is the seventh member of the Battalion, and the tenth member of 2 PARA Battle Group to be killed this summer as the Battle Group creates space for the Afghan Government to connect to its people, and for development to progress in the Northern Helmand River valley. The cost is high and painful to Pte Cowton's friends but most of all to his family, who had expected him home for a short R&R break in a few days time.

"Pte Cowton, like those we already mourn, was a remarkable man because he knew, as every member of the Battle Group knows, what he was risking and yet he chose to face a dangerous enemy in a harsh environment and to do so every day for his friends, his regiment and his country. We will remember him, and will continue to build on the progress he was prepared to give his life to achieve. Utrunque Paratus," said Lt Col Joe O'Sullivan, 2 Para's Commanding Officer

More at

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/MilitaryOperations/PrivatePeterJoeCowtonKilledInAfgha>

Sergeant Jon Matthews

On 25th July 2008 the UK MoD announced the death of Sergeant Jon Matthews from the Highlanders, 4th Battalion, the Royal Regiment of Scotland (attached to the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Regiment), arising from a joint action with the Afghan Army in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. He is the 113th British fatality.

Further details and tributes from his Commanding Officer ("absolute professional - courageous - reliable to the core and unwaveringly loyal to all") and colleagues can be found at <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/MilitaryOperations/SergeantJonathanMatthewsOfTheHighlandersKilledInAfghanistan.htm>

Corporal Jason Barnes

Corporal Jason Barnes "a promising NCO with a bright future" was driving a Vector ambulance which hit an improvised explosive device which killed him in Helmand, Afghanistan on 22nd July 2008.

We shall mark any future sacrifice as it occurs, by updating a monthly post.