

THE Ministry of Defence has confirmed that it was Lance Corporal Paul Watkins, from 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), that was killed in Afghanistan on Saturday 16 July 2011.

On the morning of 16 July 2011, Lance Corporal Watkins deployed with his Advisory Team and a section from their partner Afghan National Army company to an area west of Gereshk in central Helmand province. The Advisory Team was conducting a routine patrol with their Afghan counterparts.

Lance Corporal Watkins was in a fire support position, providing overwatch for the foot patrol from his Jackal vehicle. As the second-in-command of his patrol team, he was providing both fire support and a command and communications link to his higher headquarters.

The foot patrol was nearing the end of its route and returning to Lance Corporal Watkins' location when it came under contact from enemy small arms fire. It was during this small arms engagement that Lance Corporal Watkins was fatally wounded.

Lance Corporal Watkins served with C Squadron, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's). He deployed to Afghanistan in early March as part of the 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords) Brigade Advisory Group.

Lance Corporal Watkins was from Port Elizabeth in the Republic of South Africa, and was born on 11 April 1987. He joined the Army in September 2007 as a Foreign and Commonwealth soldier and attended basic training at the Army Training Regiment in Winchester before joining the 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's). A determined and intelligent soldier, he completed his special-to-arm training at Bovington, the home of the Royal Armoured Corps, before joining his new regiment in Hohn, Germany.

During his four years of service, Lance Corporal Watkins served on Operation TELIC 12, as part of a mentoring and training team to the Iraqi airborne forces in Az Zubayr. In September 2010, he completed his Junior Command Course on which he performed to an excellent standard.

He will be sorely missed by his regiment. He leaves behind his mother Jill, father Rod, and brothers Luke and Simon.

The family of Lance Corporal Watkins have made the following statement:

"Paul wanted to join the Army from a very young age. He was proud to be a soldier and was proud of what he was doing; he died doing a job that he loved. He was such a loving and caring son, grandson and brother. He will be very sadly missed by his family and friends who loved him dearly."

Lieutenant Colonel William Fooks, Commanding Officer of 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), said:

"Lance Corporal Paul Watkins was absolutely someone you'd want on your team and by your side; tough, hugely dependable and determined, yet compassionate. When all around him was frenzied activity Lance Corporal Watkins would be serenely and reassuringly calm. And combined with his arid sense of humour and his disarming grin, a big problem very quickly became no problem at all.

"Born in South Africa he'd joined the 9th/12th Royal Lancers for the adventure - and by God did he find it, even in the relatively short space of time that he had been with the regiment. This was a mature and vibrant young man, who lived his life to the full and was trusted and respected across the board both in Germany, where the regiment is based, and out here in Helmand.

"Lance Corporal Watkins will be missed immeasurably by us all but never forgotten. But it is his parents, his brothers and his Advisory Team that our thoughts and prayers are with at this time."

Lieutenant Colonel Giles Woodhouse, Commanding Officer of the Brigade Advisory Group and 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords), said:

"The tragic loss of Lance Corporal Watkins has hit the Brigade Advisory Group hard. He was a popular and mature soldier who loved serving in the British Army. He had great potential and would have undoubtedly had an extremely fulfilling and promising career.

"Lance Corporal Watkins gave 100 per cent in all that he did, supporting his fellow soldiers and his chain of command selflessly. Passionate about his profession, he died assisting the Afghan National Army to be better able to protect the population. Our sincere condolences and thoughts are with Lance Corporal Watkins's family and friends."

Colonel Jens Riis-Vestergaard, Commanding Officer of Combined Force Nahr-e Saraj (North), said:

"Lance Corporal Paul Watkins was the embodiment of a counter-insurgent soldier and as part of the Advisory Team in Nahr-e Saraj (North) he was at the very forefront of helping the Afghan people achieve prosperity and freedom from oppression.

"Naturally gifted, courageous and a born leader, he worked hard in everything he did to help deliver his part in establishing peace in central Helmand."Major Simon Doherty

"He died doing his duty and keeping others safe. For that we owe him our utmost respect and we will always remember him for his courage. Our deepest sympathies go to his family and friends, and also his colleagues who will continue their mission without a close comrade. He will be forever missed."

Major Simon Doherty, Officer Commanding C Squadron, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), said:

"Lance Corporal Watkins died a hero. Naturally gifted, courageous and a born leader, he worked hard in everything he did to help deliver his part in establishing peace in central

Helmand. With a pedigree in mentoring developing armies, he thrived in this environment, developing the trust so critically needed to show the Afghan soldiers the way ahead. With his sack full of talents he was always wanted on everyone's team.

"He was larger than life and was achieving all his dreams as a consummate professional on a rapid path to wider success. Lance Corporal Watkins was savagely proud to be a C Squadron soldier, chosen specifically for this specialist role on the back of solid performances on countless training events. He had blossomed as a junior leader, having been promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal.

"Lance Corporal Watkins would have wanted nothing to take the team's eye off the job in hand. With that in mind, our thoughts are with his friends and family at this time, but we will only strengthen our resolve against the insurgency in the pursuit of peace. We will have our chance to mourn his death when we get home."

Captain William Greig, Second-in-Command, C Squadron, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), said:

"Lance Corporal Watkins was a proud Lancer who always had a positive outlook. He was a highly competent and robust soldier and commander. He was an extremely popular C Squadron character who embraced everything that Army life had to offer.

"A true South African, Lance Corporal Watkins was immensely patriotic and a promising sportsman. He will be remembered for being great fun and utterly loyal. Lance Corporal Watkins will be deeply missed by all 9th/12th Royal Lancers and our thoughts are with his family."

"Robust, honest and a consummate professional, he was an example to his peers and subordinates alike." Warrant Officer Class 2 Mathew Noone

Captain James Davis, C Squadron, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), said:

"Without doubt, Lance Corporal Watkins was a great boon to every part of the organisation under which he served. He was a genuine pleasure to be around and will be sorely missed; never a dull moment could pass in his presence. A natural leader in all aspects of his life and a model soldier, others will aspire to achieve what he already has done, both in and out of work."

Warrant Officer Class 2 Mathew Noone, Squadron Sergeant Major, C Squadron, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), said:

"Lance Corporal Watkins was a dedicated soldier; he enjoyed every facet of military life and was always enthused by its diversity. Robust, honest and a consummate professional, he was an example to his peers and subordinates alike. He displayed leadership qualities on a daily basis and was destined for a full and promising career.

"Away from the bustle of the Army, Paul was a keen sportsman, enjoying football, cricket and rugby. He served the wider garrison community as a lifeguard at the local swimming pool, giving

up his time for others. Always cheerful, even in the face of adversity, a smile on his face was guaranteed. Paul was liked by all who knew him; he was great company to be around.

"Lance Corporal Watkins was an asset to his squadron and his regiment. He was a friend to those he served alongside, and as such his death will have a profound effect on us all. He will be missed, though his sacrifice will never be forgotten. Our deepest sympathies now rest with his family during this, the saddest of times."

Corporal Daniel Edwards, C Squadron, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), said:

"Paul was a great friend to all, easy to talk to and caring. He was a man that could be depended upon in every situation. Strong in mind, big in heart and a genuinely nice guy. All that knew him well are deeply missing him and saddened by his death. It pains me that I do not possess the words to describe how Paul was as a man."

Lance Corporal Christopher Luff, C Squadron, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), said:

"I had known Paul since my first week at Bovington where we began Phase 2 training together. He was always helpful, friendly and never allowed me to slack or get left behind. Since then our friendship grew; we served together in Iraq, Germany and Afghanistan.

"Always honest, always loyal, he was a down to earth great guy and an excellent soldier who will be sorely missed." Lance Corporal Ian Smith

"He was always the first to start and last to leave work. Known to his friends as the grumpiest of old men, he would always be complaining, but that would never stop him from getting the job done and would always give the rest of us the perception that it would never get as bad for us as it was for him.

"My fondest memories of Paul were with the lads in the squadron bar on the weekend, having eaten our weight in steak, wearing flip-flops, shorts and his South African rugby jersey despite it feeling like the coldest German winter on record. He didn't feel the cold or complain as long as he had a beer!

"He will be sorely missed by everyone who knew him and the squadron will not be the same without him."

Lance Corporal Adam Younger, C Squadron, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), said:

"Paul was far too big a character to be summed up in just one paragraph. He was a gleaming bloke, one of the boys, but somehow maintained a maturity to keep the rest of us all in check. He was the guy you would turn to when the going got tough. He would have never given up and it is profound he was there fighting to the end."

Lance Corporal Ian Smith, C Squadron, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), said:

"Paul Watkins was a dedicated, hardworking soldier who always took great pride in getting the job done first time, every time. Never shy of grafting for others, he was always an asset for the team whether on patrol or giving you a lift in the early hours of the morning.

"Always honest, always loyal, he was a down to earth great guy and an excellent soldier who will be sorely missed."

Private Ika Devenish, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Staffords), said:

"In the short period of time I got to know Paul, I saw how he brought a lot to our team. His keenness when it came to day to day activities, advising the Afghan soldiers and general administration was outstanding; he was a soldier's soldier. He was a good mate and will be deeply missed."

Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox, said:

"I was deeply saddened to learn of the death of Lance Corporal Paul Watkins. His colleagues speak of his compassion, his determination, and his resolute commitment to his duty. I extend my deepest condolences to his family, his friends and all those who served with him."