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Lance Corporal Stephen Ian McKee, from 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, was killed in Afghanistan on 9 May 2011, when during an operation to disrupt insurgent activity in the northern Dashte area of Nad-e Ali district his vehicle struck an improvised explosive device.

Lance Corporal McKee, aged 27, came from Banbridge in County Down, Northern Ireland. In 2003 he joined 3rd Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment as a part-time soldier. When the Home Service were disbanded he decided to transfer to 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment and he joined them at Tern Hill, Shropshire, in April 2007.

Lance Corporal McKee was posted to B Company, where he served with distinction for 3 years before moving to the Machine Gun Platoon in D Company in 2010. He first deployed on Op HERRICK 8 in March 2008 and was quickly recognised as a fine soldier, trustworthy and courageous.

Lance Corporal McKee always had time for everyone. He was a family-man and showed enormous strength, particularly during a very difficult time last year when his two-day-old daughter passed away. Lance Corporal McKee had strong family connections with the regiment, with two brothers, a cousin and his father-in-law all serving in the First Battalion, and with another brother serving in the Second Battalion.

Lance Corporal McKee's loss is profound. It has affected this Battalion and the wider Regimental family most deeply. He leaves behind his wife Carley, his parents Heather and Bobby, his brothers Michael, Gareth and Robert, and his sisters Kelly and Rebecca, our thoughts are with them all at this sad time.

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The wife of Lance Corporal McKee, Carley McKee, said:

"You will always be my hero and every step I take in life, I will have my two angels looking after me. You truly are the best husband, father, son and brother anyone could ask for. Till we meet again. Love you always."

"Stephen McKee was the finest of men; he was irrepressible, he was utterly reliable and he was a fearsome warrior."Lieutenant Colonel Colin Weir

Lieutenant Colonel Colin Weir MBE, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, said:

"The death of Lance Corporal Stephen McKee has sent a wave of shock and sadness through this Battlegroup. Everyone knows the McKees. Everyone respects the McKees. The McKees are in the First Battalion and the McKees are in the Second Battalion.</p>

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"It is families like the McKees that make this Regiment what it is; they are the fibre that runs through us and what gives us our fighting spirit. It is because of families like the McKees that we are the winners in this fight.

"Stephen McKee was the finest of men; he was irrepressible, he was utterly reliable and he was a fearsome warrior. As part of the Operations Company he fought the long battle to drive the enemy out of the Nad-e'Ali Canal zone and into the desert.

"And it was into the desert that Stephen and his comrades followed, in pursuit of the enemy. When he died, he was attacking the insurgent in his bases there, harassing him, capturing his weapons and destroying his explosives.

"Not only was he the finest of Irish soldiers, he was a man with great depths of resilience. I had the privilege of spending a little while with him and his wife Carley after their baby daughter passed away unexpectedly last year.

"His parents and his brothers and sisters had closed around the grieving couple. Their strength and the unshakeable of bonds of this wonderful family were truly humbling. Please God be with them all now.

"Faugh A Ballagh."</p>

<p>Major Gregory Murphy, Officer Commanding D Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, said:

"The death of Lance Corporal Stephen

McKee comes as a most profound loss. Rarely would you find someone as conscientious, generous, hard working and as professional as Stephen. I remember my first meeting with him on Salisbury Plain when he was commanding the opposing force on my Company exercise.

"The first thing that struck me was his disarming smile, the second that unflinchingly positive character of his. Regardless of his own discomfort or the adverse conditions crippling those around him, there would be Stephen with that bloody grin of his. He was a popular and endeared leader within the Company and whilst he was easy to like, he was a man that was even easier to respect.

"Lance Corporal McKee joined Machine Gun Platoon in early 2010 but has always been closely linked with the Regimental Bugles, Pipes and Drums. He was destined for greater things and had just completed his Machine Gun Section Commanders Course before deploying to Afghanistan at the end of January 2011.

"After rejoining the Company he pushed himself immediately to the front and that is where he continued to lead from. He was employed as a Patrol second-in-command and had already taken part in numerous air assault operations. On the day of his death he was taking part in a cordon and search of a small Kalay (village).

"He was determined to do the best he could, to stand shoulder to shoulder with his mates and to serve his country proudly. And this he did.

"Stephen gave his life doing the job he loved. He was a committed, brave and selfless leader that thought nought of himself and everything of those around him. He was a loving husband to Carley and a totemic man of the Regiment. The tragedy has deeply hit the men, not just of D Company, but across the Battalion. That grin of his will be hard to replace.

"Brave, selfless, stoic and good craic with it ♦ these are just some of the accolades lauded on Lance Corporal Stephen McKee by his fellow soldiers. They are the mainstay of every Irish soldier and he was their very embodiment." Captain Quinton Lenegan Royal Marines

Captain Quinton Lenegan Royal Marines, Machine Gun Platoon Commander, D Company, 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, said:

"Stephen's death is a terrible and heart-felt loss. In my time with 1 R IRISH he certainly had an impact on me. From the moment he joined my Platoon I realised that Stevie was special and I was truly inspired by the motivation he displayed in all aspects of his job.

"He was a selflessly committed work and family man who faced every challenge head on and never faltered. His friendly 'happy go lucky' attitude made him extremely popular and he was embraced by the Platoon.

"Lance Corporal McKee was a man who was destined to excel; Stephen had just passed his Machine Gun Section Commanders course and was due to play a key role in the forging of a new Fire Support Platoon.

"The excitement that he displayed when we discussed the prospects of forming a new Platoon was truly inspiring and is testament to the utter professional that he was. His commitment to the Battalion and loyalty to his brothers in arms was humbling. Stephen was not willing to rest on his laurels after his Machine Gun course but instead deployed on Op HERRICK 13 and joined his Platoon.

"Stephen joined the men he loved and has paid the ultimate sacrifice for us, his Battalion and his country. Stephen will live on in my memories and his wife Carley and his family will be in my thoughts during this turbulent time. Rest in Peace Steve."

Captain Benjamin Cox, 11 Platoon Commander, D Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, said:

"Brave, selfless, stoic and good craic with it ♦ these are just some of the accolades lauded on Lance Corporal Stephen McKee by his fellow soldiers. They are the mainstay of every Irish soldier and he was their very embodiment. He comes from a strong line of Royal Irish stock and it showed. He consistently exceeded what was asked of him and did so in good mirth. He was truly inspiring.

"Lance Corporal McKee came to Ops Company and 11 Platoon at the end of January. He had completed his

course in Brecon and was chomping at the bit to command and join his fellow Rangers on operations.

"He joined an experienced Ops Company with many an Air Assault operations to its name and settled into the pace without missing a step. From the off he added value, and that he continued to do so throughout all of this is testament to his fine character.

"The Platoon's thoughts and prayers are with Carley, Stephen's wife, and with his brothers and cousin in the Battalion: Gareth, Michael and Richie. He will be sorely missed by one and all in this close knit Battalion and his memory will live on."

"I could start by saying he was a rough-cut diamond and everyone would know what this means, but not with Stephen. He was not a rough-cut diamond or a bit of a rogue ♦ he was genuinely a nice guy and a doting husband and as such I feel privileged to have known him."Warrant Officer Class 2 John Brennan

Warrant Officer Class 2 John Brennan, Company Sergeant Major, D Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, said:"I could start by saying he was a rough-cut diamond and everyone would know what this means, but not with Stephen. He was not a rough-cut diamond or a bit of a rogue ♦ he was genuinely a nice guy and a doting husband and as such I feel privileged to have known him.

"In work he was always enthusiastic; a happy go lucky soldier with a budding career ahead of him, having just passed a Machine Gun Section Commander's course. Lance Corporal McKee will be truly missed, not just by me ♦ he has left a huge hole within the Machine Gun Platoon and even more so throughout the whole Company, but it does not stop there ♦ If you did not know Lance Corporal McKee you would have most certainly heard of the McKee name within the Battalion.

"It is not the first time I have served with one of the McKee family, and I feel extremely fortunate to have done so; this is a sentiment that is shared throughout the Company and the Battalion.

"I would like to mention his brothers Lance Corporal Michael McKee and Ranger Gareth McKee, of whom I had the pleasure of serving alongside on the last Operation in 2008, and his cousin Corporal Richie McKee whom I have yet to serve with.

"I feel honoured to have met Lance Corporal McKee's parents and I can see why the McKee family, through their parents, have earned themselves the reputation of being such genuine people.

"Lance Corporal McKee has made the ultimate sacrifice, however, in our memories he will live on. Our thoughts at this most difficult time are with his wife, Carley, whom he has left behind. I also extend them to his parents, Heather and Bobby and the wider McKee family. These words will bring little solace but we as a family Regiment are feeling his loss most keenly."

Lance Corporal Jason Orr, Machine Gun Platoon, D Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, said:

"I first met Stephen through his brother Michael. It didn't take me long to realise what a warm hearted and true all round good lad Stephen was. When he asked me to be part of the guard of honour at his marriage to Carley, I was delighted and proud to do it. Although, I did tell him that I was worried about whether I would fit into my Number 2 Uniform in time for the occasion.

"At the beginning of 2010 Stephen and I both moved to Machine Gun Platoon. He was the type of guy who was always there to lend a hand and the first to volunteer to help out. He never complained with his lot.

"He just knuckled down and got on with the job, but always kept an eye out for others. It was his nature that he would never see you stuck and would be right by your side when you needed him.

"Professionally he was brilliant. He loved his soldiering and was keen to continue his career. He enjoyed the challenge of the machine gun section commander's course and couldn't wait to join his mates on the front line. He hated the idea of not being able to help his mates.

"My thoughts and prayers go out to his wife Carley, his parents Heather and Bobby and his brothers and sisters Michael, Gareth, Robert, Rebecca

& Kelly. I know Stephen was a big family man and loved them all dearly.

"I've lost a true friend but I know he's looking down on us now with that big loveable smile of his."

"Stevie was a true friend. I'll remember him as the quiet man but when he spoke he had me on my knees in laughter, he was an utter gentleman and I'll miss him always."Lance Corporal Glen Crooks

Corporal William Haighton, Javelin Platoon, D Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, said:

"My thoughts are with you Carley, Richie, Michael, Gareth and the rest of the McKee family. You were a true hero and a loyal friend ♦ reunited with your daughter, R.I.P Mate; gone too soon!"

Lance Corporal Glen Crooks, Javelin Platoon, D Company, 1st Battalion, the Royal Irish Regiment, said:

"Stevie was a true friend. I'll remember him as the quiet man but when he spoke he had me on my knees in laughter, he was an utter gentleman and I'll miss him always. My thoughts go out to the McKee family especially Carley, and the McKee brothers."

Lance Corporal David Pepper, D Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, said:

"My thoughts are with all the McKee family through this hard time. Stevie was a good friend and we had many good times while we were in B Company together. He will be sadly missed by everyone in the Company."

Ranger Wayne McCreery, Machine Gun Platoon, D Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, said:

"My thoughts are with the McKee family at this sad time in their lives. I had the privilege of being with Stephen on the whole of his last day with us. He was a true gentleman who made our time here a lot easier and when you worked with Stephen you always knew the job was being done right.

"We had many laughs together and our last few weeks here won't be the same without him. Stephen is and always will be a credit to the McKee family and we will sorely miss him. Rest in peace mate. You were a good friend and you won't be forgotten."</p></div>

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