Acting Serjeant Stuart McGrath
2nd Battalion The Rifles

It is with deep sadness that the Ministry of Defence must confirm the death of Acting Serjeant Stuart McGrath of 2nd Battalion The Rifles (2 RIFLES). Acting Serjeant McGrath was killed as a result of an explosion in Gereshk District, Helmand province, on the afternoon of 16 September 2009, dying from his wounds before he could be extracted to hospital.

Serjeant Stuart McGrath, aged 28, was born in Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire, on 5 December 1980. He began his Army training in October 1999 and joined 1st Battalion The Royal Green Jackets in June the following year (The Royal Green Jackets was one of five infantry regiments which combined to form The Rifles in 2007).

He made an early start to junior leadership, completing a Junior Non Commissioned Officer (JNCO) Cadre in November 2001. From an early stage he specialised in mortaring, completing both standard and advanced mortar courses with excellent results in 2004 and 2005.

From the beginning he stood out as a fiercely bright and determined individual. Not being satisfied with the standard career path for a Mortarman, he put himself forward to attend the Platoon Serjeants' Battle Course following his tour in Afghanistan; he wanted to push himself into the most demanding roles the Army had to offer.

An intensely energetic and fit Rifleman, Serjeant McGrath led a team from the Battalion to complete the Dublin Marathon in November 2008. Younger than all the others in his role, he had endless potential.

He died in an IED explosion on 16 September 2009 near Forward Operating Base (FOB) Keenan.

Serjeant McGrath leaves his wife, Emma, three sons, Ryan, Daniel, and Dylan, and his daughter, Niamh, born in June whilst he was already deployed to Afghanistan.

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

"Serjeant McGrath has been one of 2 RIFLES' rock-hard Mortarmen. At only 28, he was one of the youngest members of the most prized club in the Battalion, the Serjeants' Mess, and I can still clearly see the visible pride on his face when I had the privilege to promote him earlier this year. There was nothing he did not know about Mortaring that was worth knowing. It is easy to be good at Mortaring but to be brilliant at Mortaring is extraordinarily difficult.

"Serjeant McGrath was indubitably brilliant at it - he could run the Mortar Line or control the

mortar fire on the ground equally well and very, very quickly, which is what we have needed out here. He often dug us out of scrapes. And Serjeant McGrath was fearless. He fought in one of the most heavily IED'd areas of Afghanistan and somehow wore that challenge lightly.

"Never shy to tell me what he thought, he was full of appropriate opinion, even if I did not always agree with him! I liked him dearly for that strength of character - it was what drew people of every rank to him. His Riflemen loved him because he was so good at his job and because he had an indelible sense of fun.

"He knew only one lane - that was the fast lane and he was always in it - at work, at home and at play. His target was to be a Rifle Platoon Serjeant before trying for the SAS - an entirely appropriate ambition. We have lost a star and the hole he leaves behind is huge. This hurts but Serjeant McGrath will want his baton held high and it will be, assuredly so - by all of us in this, the fight of our lives.

"Mac was also a devoted and attentive husband and father. Emma was the light of his life and he adored his four children, the youngest born not four months ago. The tragedy is that they will not know first hand how great a man their father was. But, Mac, we will tell them for you - often. It is the very least we can do. They are all firmly in our prayers."

Major Sam Plant, Officer Commanding C Squadron Light Dragoons, said:

"Serjeant 'Mac' McGrath was an exceptional soldier in all respects. His performance under extreme pressure on Op HERRICK 10 had been first class. His task was to provide patrols in the area of FOB Keenan with indirect mortar fire support and this he did with enormous professionalism and enthusiasm – what Mac did not know about mortars was not worth knowing. He commanded his close-knit team with an abundance of flair and imagination, always putting his men first and leading from the front at every opportunity.

"Mac displayed a real zest for life beyond the business of soldiering. His love of life, humour and sense of fun pervaded all that he did and this rubbed off on those that had the privilege of working with him. His contribution to the morale of the small, isolated FOB Keenan team was immense and when there was fun and laughter, Mac was never far away.

"Mac was an immensely proud family man, whose 4th child was born while he was at home for R&R earlier in the tour. Whilst his untimely and tragic death has had an extreme effect on all of his friends and colleagues in FOB Keenan, this will be nothing compared to the pain that will be felt by his family at home. Our heartfelt thoughts and prayers are constantly with them at this most difficult time."

Captain Rupert Streatfeild, Operations Officer 2 RIFLES Battle Group, said:

"Having worked closely with Serjeant McGrath for the past 18 months I have grown to appreciate a deeply energetic, intelligent and proud man.

"Mac was not satisfied to coast through his time in the Army. He was jumping from one

challenge to the next and with each step seemed to gain momentum. He had ambitions to join the SAS, something I believe was well within his reach. He absorbed the responsibility of leadership and took a keen interest in the professional development and welfare of each of his men.

"As one of my mortar section commanders, he taught me a great deal and with his proactive nature took work from me, removing huge weights off my shoulders. He had a sharp wit and kept many a character on his toes and I pitied anyone who inadvertently walked into the Mortar Platoon Office, especially young officers.

"His absence will be painful as he was such a large part of the Mortar Platoon. He was fiercely proud and loving towards his wife Emma, his boys Ryan, Daniel and Dylan and his baby daughter Niamh. Our prayers are with them all during this painful period.

Second Lieutenant Ed Hassard, 11 Platoon Commander:

"In the few short weeks I knew Serjeant McGrath, he made a resounding impression as a lively, dedicated Mortarman, totally at ease with running an efficient and professional Mortar line. Leading from the front, he was always keen to be out on the ground with the patrols.

"He was both liked and respected by all those who had the good fortune to encounter him. The tragedy of his loss brings great sadness to the Battalion and well beyond. Ever attentive to his duty, he added also a strong sense of humour, and would enjoy a joke with his fellow Riflemen at every opportunity.

"He was guided by a fierce drive that was every bit as great as his ability, and in both he was uncommonly gifted. He leaves a gap that will never be filled, and his comrades are bereft of a warm leader of extraordinary devotion.

"Our thoughts and prayers will be with his wife and children, the youngest of whom will not yet know his greatness. His military family also will forever mourn his loss.

Captain Ross Hocking, Fire Support Team Commander, C Company 2 RIFLES Battle Group, said:

"Serjeant McGrath was a keen soldier, a good friend and a proud father. He was a credit to his cap badge and dedicated to 2 Rifles, especially to his Mortar line. We all have fond memories sitting around a fire drinking cups of tea and eating bread made in an ammo tin whilst telling stories from home.

"Sjt McGrath's family was spoken of often with love and devotion; we are sure he will be missed deeply. He was a great man to have in an outpost as his character and attitude never faltered, making him one of those people who would make time fly.

"Mac was a good man, a better friend and one hell of a soldier, our thoughts and prayers lay with your family and hope you rest in piece.

"Never forgotten but sorely missed. From all ranks of Fire Support Team Witchcraft 27."

Colour Serjeant Mark Munt, Mortar Platoon Second in Command, said:

"Stu 'Mac' McGrath had only been in the Army for two and a half years when he passed a JNCO cadre. He was a bit of a flyer but wanted to try something different so joined Mortars. He was always looking for his next level of achievement and excelled on the mortars courses. He completed the SAS briefing course last year but put that career path on hold so that he could take his lads to Afghanistan.

"Although he deployed as a Mortar Section Commander, he was always happy and willing to go back to what he excelled at and help out as a Mortar Fire Controller on patrol. Mac always had a mischievous grin on his face and left you with the impression that he was up to something, although he never got away with anything - he always started laughing as soon as he got up to something.

"He loved life in the Army but it came second to his wife, Emma, whom he loved deeply and his kids, Ryan, Daniel, Dylan, and his latest addition Naimh, whom he adored. We often told him to get a hobby and stop producing offspring but Mac would not have it any different, he loved his kids.

"The whole of the Mortar Platoon and all who know them are thinking of them and our deepest thoughts and prayers go out to them at this very sad time.

"Mac, you are a gleaming Squaddie, and you would have gone a long way in the Army. I know you were after my job as the Mortar Platoon 2IC or to join the SAS (both similar types of career path; you were more than capable of achieving both. Mac, you are a good mate and a gleaming Mortarman and you died doing the job you loved.

"You'll be missed, mate, but never forgotten so I'll finish by repeating the phrase you were always saying whenever you had the joy.....'bring the rain.'

Serjeant Jason Bloomer, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"I first met Mac when he turned up to Battalion in 2000. He soon fell foul of the rules by being caught at an un-cleared address in Northern Ireland. Ironically, that address was the home of his then girlfriend Emma, who later became his beloved wife and mother to his three sons, Ryan, Daniel and Dylan, and his daughter, Niamh, who was born during this tour in June.

"Mac joined the Mortar Platoon in 2003 and we soon became good friends. It's only now that I realise just how lucky I was to have attended both the Junior and Senior Mortar Courses with him in Warminster. Without him there to help me with the more technical parts of the courses, I'm sure I wouldn't have got through it. But that was Mac all over, always ready to help anyone.

"He loved his fitness and it was not unusual after a platoon run or tab to see him go off and do it all again just to get some benefit from it. He would often ask me to go on these extra miles with

him but I'd reply, 'no thanks, I'm not going on selection.' That was his next goal, to join the SAS. Such was Mac's determination and willingness to give everything 200 per cent, I'm sure he would have achieved this goal.

"The Mortar Platoon has lost both a great soldier and a friend. All our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this extremely difficult and sad time."

Serjeant Colin Tomlinson, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"When I first met Mac many years ago, he was on a Mortar Cadre training to be a Number 1. I thought he must be deaf, because no matter how many times I would repeat the orders, Mac would get them wrong. This was amusing to all of the other lads as I made run around with the Mortar rounds, which we called the 'Spit Fire'. By the end of the Cadre he was a professional at it!

"Mac really proved himself to be an asset not only within the Platoon but also in 2 RIFLES. Over the years he achieved so much and was always in competition to be the best and be better than myself. Well, Mac, you were that, mate. You were very professional at everything that you did, you gained the respect of all who were around you and were always at the forefront of any craic. RIP.

"You are a devoted husband to Emma and an amazing father to Ryan, Daniel, Dylan and your daughter Niamh. Mac would always, if he had the time, drop the kids off and pick them up. Even if we went on runs he would break track, just to give his kids a kiss before they went to school, proof that his family came first in everything that he did. Our thoughts are with them right now.

"It was a privilege and honour to have known you my friend. You will truly be missed and will never be forgotten or replaced. I am sure you are up there with all the other brothers and be saying, 'get up now, boys, it's time to go to work'. So, my friend, we are, as you watch over us.

"RIP Mac. Until we meet once again, God Rest Your Soul."

Corporal Pat Cullinane, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"I first met Mac in 2001 when he was a Lance Jack in 3 Platoon, and he showed me around Weeton Camp. That's when he started calling me Frodo Baggins because I was 5ft nothing with size 11 feet, ever the comedian, Mac was.

"I've got many funny stories to tell about Mac but one springs to mind about him being a Hobby Chef in South Armagh. It was Mac's turn to cook the lads some food in the tower so he did them chips and pies. When the lads started to eat and cut into the pies, all this grease started to pour out. The lads turned to Mac and asked, 'how did you cook this?' Mac replied, 'with the chips.' The lads said, 'what in the oven?' Mac said 'no, in the deep fat fryer.' A few harsh words were said that day but Mac didn't care because he never was allowed to cook again! Thinking about it, he had probably done it on purpose.

"Mac will be missed by all, and especially by me, but not just for his cookery skills. God rest your soul mate."

Corporal Luke Hare, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"I first met Mac when we both joined 7 Platoon for the Iraq tour, but unfortunately I never got the chance to work with the platoon once we arrived at Basrah Palace. I then worked with him again when I joined the Mortar Platoon in late 2007. I've always known Mac to be honest and as hard-working as they come.

"Whether it was fitness or Platoon admin, Mac would be at the forefront and setting the standard. He was always a NCO for the blokes and would have gone far in his Army career without losing his touch with the Riflemen. Whenever I had a problem or a question he would always help and give me advice without complaint. He was a top man and a great soldier.

"You will be missed mate and never replaced. I hope your family can take pride in what you've achieved in your life and my heart goes out to your wife and children. Goodbye, my friend."

Corporal Dave Warrillow, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"Mac, to his friends, leaves behind a wife, three sons and a baby daughter. I first met Mac on the Mortar Cadre in 2002. The first thing that comes to mind was that, whenever we were on the drills lessons and he got flustered calling out the bearings and elevations, he stuttered much to the annoyance of the Serjeants taking the Mortar Cadre. This quickly became a standing joke within the platoon but as well as take the rippings, he could give it. Mac had an ability like no other to rip people, and it wasn't bullying, it was character building. It didn't matter who or where you were, you would still get ripped.

"If you came down the mortar line in our FOB, the first voice you would hear was Mac's saying 'you lost?' or 'what you doing down here?' Then the rippings would start. On the job, he was second to none as a Mortar Fire Controller, a Mortar Line Section Commander. He even went out as a Rifle Section Commander for the Mercian Platoon when they were a Corporal down. He volunteered without being asked. He was a keen soldier, a Rifleman through and through and looking forward to Senior Brecon next year and then selection. He had even wanted to come back as Mortar Platoon 2IC sometime in the future.

"He showed faith in people's abilities even when others didn't. At home, he was a loving and devoted husband to his wife Emma and a proud and loving father to his three sons, Dylan, Daniel, Ryan and, his newly born daughter, Naimh.

"His young son Dylan, was heard saying to his Mum one Friday morning whilst walking to school as CO's PT was going on and the stragglers at the back were passing them, 'Mummy do you know why they are all at the back?' Emma said, 'No' to which Dylan replied, 'It's because they are all fat!' This was the typical thing Mac would say and always made him laugh when he mentioned it. He is definitely his father's son.

"Mac, you will be sorely missed but never forgotten, as a friend and a comrade, it was an honour to serve with you."

Corporal Darren Whymark, Section Commander, 11 Platoon, said:

"Ten years ago, we were in training. After ten years there were only three of us left. Now there are two, but you were always number one. You were first to get promoted to every rank. In every capacity you were streets ahead of the rest of us. Your determination would always make it that way.

"We have lost a great, long-term friend. You will always be number one. You will be sadly missed."

Lance Corporal Alexander Harvell, Section Second in Command, 11 Platoon, said:

"Serjeant McGrath, or better known as Mac to his friends and family. How to describe Mac in a few simple words? Well, you can't - he was worth so much more: A beloved husband, father and great friend who was always there for a chat.

"In the short time I got to work with Mac, first in FOB Gibraltar and then in FOB Keenan, I found out what a great comrade he was. Never workshy, he always offered to get out on the ground and to stag on so the blokes could get some sleep. But the one thing that will always stay with me was his great sense of humour. Whether I was walking to the shower that was right next to the mortar pit or walking past the pit in Keenan, he would be the first to jump up and give me abuse and then tell me to get the cans in. Put the sense of humour aside and you've got a great husband and father. He always spoke about his family – he was a true family man and you could tell that by the way he spoke about his kids, especially his latest - his first little girl.

"He was also a great soldier. He used to talk about completing Senior Brecon and going back to a Rifle Company as a Platoon Serjeant. We used to laugh and joke about both being in the same Platoon. But don't get me wrong - Mac loved his Mortars. He taught me a lot in that short time and that will always stay with me.

"Our prayers are with his family at this time: his wife Emma, his three boys, Ryan, Daniel, and Dylan, and his little girl, Niamh.

"So, until we meet again, Mac; you can get the cans in and keep them cool! R.I.P. Mac."

LCpl Daniel Scally, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"You never expect to write something like this so it deeply saddens me to do it. I met Serjeant 'Mac ' McGrath when we deployed to Iraq in 2006 with B Company. Even though he was in a different platoon to me, he was still approachable as an NCO and as a bloke. I then got the pleasure to work with him when I joined Mortars in 2007, he showed a brilliant knowledge of his job as well as an unbelievable if what sometimes painful level of fitness. Mac throughout the whole time I knew him showed tremendous faith and trust in the platoon and there was never

any difference in how he treated anyone because of their rank. He will be truly missed. Rest in piece my friend."

LCpl Jope Tikoisuva, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"I can't believe I'm writing this for a Mortarman well known in Mortar Platoon. Mac was keen, well disciplined, and loved his job. Everyone in Mortars calls me 'crazy legs' when it comes to playing football, because Mac gave me that name. I will miss your jokes, laughs and smile.

"My prayers go out to your loving wife and kids who have lost a great dad. You can be proud of your dad; he was one of the best soldiers in Battalion and loved what he did best, soldiering.

"Rest In Peace my Brother."

Rifleman Phillip 'Ratty' Ratcliffe, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"The first time I met Mac was in Kosovo on Op VALERO. He was my Section Commander. He was a character, one in a million, full of morale and spirit. He was a true Mortarman, who always looked after the lads; he loved his job and was very good at it. Mac inspired me to do a Mortar Numbers Cadre for Op Herrick 10, which I did and I was always put in my place when I got it wrong; he used to make us do the Spit Fire. But I did pass, thanks to Mac. I was in the Platoon then doing the training for Afghanistan; it was an honour to have worked for you, mate.

"You're a massive loss to us in Mortars, you're a true friend. RIP, mate, you will never be forgotten, our thoughts are with your family right now."

Rifleman Michael Edkins, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"I've known Mac for six years. He was a good friend and great to work for and to stand alongside him was an honour. Mac was a true professional and gave 100 per cent into everything and was one of the platoon's characters. He was destined for a long and successful career. The Mortar Cadres will never be the same due to his love of the Spit Fire drill!

"I remember on one occasion when Mac, AKA Chopper Harris, used my ankle as a football in a friendly game of Mortars football, which he claimed he had done me a favour. As a friend, he was always there to give me advice and always encouraged me to push myself in my career. Mac, you will be truly missed by me and a huge loss within the platoon and 2 RIFLES.

"My thoughts are with Emma and your four children Ryan, Daniel, Dylan and Niamh, who, I know, were your life and soul and loved and adored so much. Mac, RIP mate, you are a true Rifleman and I'm going to miss you. Swift and Bold.

Rifleman Ashley Green, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"I didn't know Mac that well before this tour of Afghanistan as I've not long been in the mortar platoon, however, once we arrived at FOB GIBRALTAR and started to get to know each other, I

realized he was as keen as they come. He loved the army and was a devoted family man. I'm sure I'm not the only one who will miss him screaming at us on the mortar line to 'get a grip' from the CP. One thing I won't miss mate are the runs you took us on - the whole mortar platoon would look like they were about to collapse. To make it even worse, you would look over at Mac and he hadn't even broke a sweat.

"You will be sorely missed by all at 2 RIFLES and our hearts go out to your wife and kids.

"From Greenie - See you at the re-org mate."

Rifleman John Holmes, Fellow Mortarman, said:

"I have known Serjeant 'Mac' McGrath from late 2001, when I met him on the Mortar Platoon Cadre. Over the years he bounced from pillar to post, doing back to back courses and appointments and flying through the ranks within the Mortar Platoon. Despite gaining promotion, he kept a 'one to one' touch with all of the Riflemen, which definitely made him the lads' favourite and someone to come to with a problem or question.

"His knowledge was second to none and fitness all most too good to be true. He would carry sixty pounds worth of weight in his day sack and still grab kit off the lads who were falling behind, making him a truly great Section Commander.

"You will be truly missed my friend. Our hearts go to your family at this truly difficult time. We will be here for them any time any place. Goodbye my friend."