

## RIFLEMAN VIJAY RAI

### A (AMBOOR) COMPANY - 2ND BATTALION THE ROYAL GURKHA RIFLES

Rifleman Vijay Rai was born in Bhojpur District, Deaurali in the East of Nepal on the 5th August 1990. The youngest of five, Rifleman Vijay Rai studied in Sidhakali Boarding School in Bhojpur until the age of 12 when he transferred to Himshikhar English School in Tarahar. After completing his education at Kasturi College, Itahari, Rifleman Vijay Rai decided his future lay in continuing his proud family history of military service. After passing the gruelling and infamous Gurkha Selection, he was enlisted into the British Army on the 21 December 2008 at the age of 18 years. He completed his basic training at the Infantry Training Centre Catterick in September 2009 before being posted to 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles in Brunei.

Rifleman Vijay Rai soon established himself as one of the leading lights within 2 Platoon, A (Amboor) Company. After a number of demanding jungle exercises it soon became apparent that this was a young man who epitomised the very finest qualities of a Gurkha Rifleman. Nowhere was this more apparent than on the sports field where his endearing personality came to the fore. A gifted footballer, he led his intake to victory in the 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles' inter-intake competition prior to deployment to Afghanistan. An integral member of the battalion, his company and recruit intake, Rifleman Vijay Rai could be found at the heart of any social gathering or function, strumming his guitar or treating everyone to his latest rendition of a Nepali folksong. Rifleman Vijay Rai deployed to Afghanistan on his first operational tour of duty attached to Combined Force Nahr-e-Saraj (South) as part of the 1 RIFLES Battle Group on 22 April 2011.

On 14 October 2011 A (Amboor) Company deployed alongside members of the Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP) and Riflemen from the First Battalion the Rifles into a temporary checkpoint named TCP Rome in an area known to have a strong insurgent presence. On 15 October 2011 Rifleman Rai took over a sentry position on the roof of TCP Rome, and about an hour later the check point was attacked with small arms fire. Rifleman Rai was hit in the opening burst. He was given medical care on the ground and evacuated to Bastion hospital by helicopter but sadly he later died of his wounds.

Rifleman Vijay's family said:

"Our family is shocked with the news of Vijay's death in Afghanistan on 15 October 2011. He was the youngest son. He followed his father's and brother's footsteps as his father and elder brother served as Indian Gurkhas and his middle brother is serving with Indian Gurkhas as a Sergeant. He rang his family a day before he was taken away from us.

"He was very proud to be a Gurkha, and died doing his chosen job. His father and family members are very proud of him"

Lieutenant Colonel Fraser Rea, Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles

said:

"2RGR has lost a fine Gurkha soldier. Rifleman Vijay was tough, loyal, uncomplaining and utterly professional. He had a ready smile, a big heart and loved his sport and music. He was deeply committed to his fellow soldiers in Amboor Company and to the local Afghans whose lives he strove to improve during the tour.

"He came from a military background and was immensely proud to have been selected for service in the British Army. He was a talented young man with vast amounts of promise. Although only two years into his own military career, he had established himself as a leader amongst his own peer group and on the sports pitch, where he excelled.

"His death, coming so close to the end of the tour and with the majority of 2RGR now back in Brunei, has rocked the Battalion. Our pain, however, is nothing compared to that of his family. He was the youngest of five siblings and leaves loving parents, two brothers and two sisters behind. Our thoughts and prayers are with them at this difficult time."

Lieutenant Colonel James de Labillière DSO MBE, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, The Rifles said:

"I met Rifleman Vijay Rai just ten days before his passing, at Amboor Company's modest and enlightening Dashain, the main Hindi celebration of the year. He sang a Nepali song in a way that quite simply played with the emotions of the gathered crowd, inciting both reflection and elation in equal measure. He was evidently a gifted and popular Gurkha Rifleman, one of a tight team of 18 'numeri' or training intake, together in Afghanistan on their first operational deployment.

"Rifleman Vijay and his Company were taking part in a joint operation with the Afghan Uniformed Police and elements of 1RIFLES. Their base was a temporary checkpoint, established in the heart of a village called Char-Baghona in Nahr-e-Saraj District. Rifleman Vijay was on sentry duty when he was fatally struck by insurgent gunfire.

"His passing comes as a great loss to his highly professional Company and to the Combined Force as a whole. His name joins the list of those who have passed before him, and will never be forgotten. As we reflect on our loss, our thoughts and prayers go particularly to his family at this most difficult of times."

Major Nick Thom, Officer Commanding A (Amboor) Company, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Rifleman Vijay turned up in A (Amboor) Company back in October 2009, not long after I took over command. I remember him arriving as part of a very close-knit group of recruits, eager and enthusiastic but initially not being one to steal the limelight. So it was actually on the basketball court that I first recall him standing out as a real character, largely because he was being far too deferential and allowing me get away with more than my dreadful skills warranted. Needless to say it did not last long and he was soon showing off his genuine talent and flair and

enjoying the banter and contest that ensued. Indeed, in all he had not been with us long, but I sense it will be for his personality and contribution to the Company out of uniform that he will be remembered most fondly. He was a true team player, keen to please and with a real ability to bring out the best in others and make them laugh. As a gifted musician and singer he particularly relished performing for the pleasure and entertainment of others whether playing the guitar or leading the Company in a rendition of a Nepali favourite. Frankly a nicer and more likeable chap one could never meet.

"An enthusiastic and hard-working soldier, he recognised that he had much to learn and always applied himself wholeheartedly to improving himself. This was his first operational tour, and five and a half months in, the manner in which he had matured and developed was evident. His sociable nature meant that he was most in his element when engaging with the local Afghans and children, but his work in this part of Nahr-e-Saraj (South) was not without significant risk and, driven by his desire to look out for his comrades, he had on a number of occasions, demonstrated true grit and courage.

"The fact that his loss has hit the Company so hard is real testament to the affection with which he was regarded, and the contribution he had made in the tragically short time he was with us. He gave his all to look out for others and in the end he paid the ultimate sacrifice doing just that: ensuring that the rest of us remained safe whilst he stood guard. A truly selfless and brave Gurkha soldier. Whilst our loss is deeply felt our thoughts must go to his family, of which he was immensely proud. I know I speak on behalf of the whole Company when I say that our thoughts and prayers are with them during this extremely difficult time."

Warrant Officer Class 2 Dillikumar Rai, A (Amboor) Company Serjeant Major, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

Rifleman Vijay Rai, was a truly outstanding and bright Gurkha soldier with an extraordinary personality. He was young but highly respected by all members of the Company, and he never failed in his duty. He loved his job and performed extremely well during this, his first tour of Afghanistan. Rifleman Vijay was a man who would always volunteer for work, he was a great entertainer and a key player within his multiple.

His sudden death will be felt by all of us and the memory of his life will never fade. I extend my most heartfelt condolences to his family and friends, and pray that his soul may rest in peace in heaven. He will always remain in our heart."

Lieutenant Benjamin Ball, 2 Platoon Commander, A (Amboor) Company, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Rifleman Vijay Rai joined the Brigade of Gurkhas in 2008 after completing the arduous selection procedure conducted in Nepal, a significant achievement in itself and he was proud to call himself a Gurkha. He joined his platoon in Brunei where his love of sports and social activity saw him fit in quickly to a platoon that grew very fond of him. He displayed significant confidence and leadership on the sports field and on numerous occasions was instrumental in leading his team to victory. Prior to and throughout the deployment to Afghanistan the pace of

life was extremely busy with substantial demands being placed upon everyone, during this period his light hearted spirit and enthusiasm was a source of morale for all those around him, comrades for whom he genuinely cared. His generosity was always plain to see, highlighted by a particularly memorable evening had on his birthday; determined to enjoy the occasion despite being stuck in a remote Check Point he bought a goat for the multiple, with which an amazing curry was prepared and the day was marked in style.

"His own morale was rarely dampened and he could often be heard singing to himself or indeed as entertainment at parties. On a professional note he always strove to understand the situation and what was required of him. He conducted himself in a professional manner and performed well in a number of very demanding situations while deployed on his first tour of Afghanistan. Overall he looked for the positive in any situation and the good in people, his team spirit was second to none and he will be sorely missed by all."

Major Yambahadur Rana MVO, Gurkha Major, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles has lost a fine soldier and I am stunned by his unexpected passing. Rifleman Vijay Rai had been with the Battalion for two years which was certainly long enough to make a lasting impression upon it and A (Amboor) Company.

"He was an immensely proud Rifleman from a strong military background, following his father and two elder brothers' footsteps who all served with the Indian Army. He epitomised the very best qualities expected of a Gurkha soldier. He will be sorely missed by all within the Battalion and his memory will endure in our hearts.

"Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family and friends; may Goddess Durga give strength to them at this very difficult time."

Rifleman Vijay Rai's colleagues in 2 Platoon, A (Amboor Company), 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Vijay was a very well disciplined and enthusiastic Rifleman whose main quality was loyalty. In a group he was always friendly and funny. He loved to crack jokes which always made us laugh. He was also very sporty and always played with lots of energy. He was a key player in helping the Platoon win a Basketball competition back in Brunei, although Football was his passion. He also loved to play the guitar and sing.

"He was a straight forward person who would always share his views and ideas with the multiple. He made friends quickly because of his nature and people wouldn't forget him quickly. Given a task he would give 110% to get it done, whatever it took. He was always ready to help and would volunteer for any extra work given to the Multiple.

"His soul will rest in peace in heaven. We will always remember him. Our unforgettable moment with him was on his birthday. We celebrated it in Check Point Pari with limited resources but made it as memorable and entertaining as possible. It was a great moment for us as a multiple and he was very happy.

"He was immensely proud of being a Gurkha and took absolute pride in his job, and we will never forget his remarkable contribution throughout the tour. His respected name and efforts will always be remembered and may God give his family the strength to face this situation."

Gurkha Recruit Intake 2009 and close friends, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"Vijay was one of the most respected members of his intake and a devoted friend to all of us. An enthusiastic and talented sportsman, he was always the one to inspire us on both the basketball and volleyball court.

"Rifleman Vijay Rai was one of the best numberis [peers] in intake 2009 who has now left us at this early stage in his life. He was a robust and hugely proud Gurkha, injecting enthusiasm into whatever he did. He was a man who led from the front and led through his example, successfully leading our intake during the recent inter-intake competition.

"He was one of the best football players in the Battalion. Immediately prior to the deployment there was an inter-recruit intake football competition. Prior to our match, the 2009 intake team looked weak and the majority of us had lost hope in winning. Vijay was instrumental in inspiring us that we could succeed and he managed everything in preparation – the 2009 intake won the match!

"He was the heart of any party or function and used to entertain us all with his singing and guitar playing. His sense of humour was endearing, yet wicked, and it was always Vijay who would tell the jokes and provide the laughs for us all.

"Whenever we were together and there was a problem to be solved, it was always Vijay who stepped forward with his knowledge and strong leadership.

"Our Vijay will be sadly missed by all his numberis. He will always be in our hearts and minds – timro atmako chir shantiko kamana gardachau."

Rifleman Vijay Rai's cousin, Sergeant Hemkumar Rai, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles said:

"The tragic death of Vijay was a huge shock to me and my family. He is still fresh in my mind and larger than life. I have no words at this stage that can capture our grief except chir shanti ko kamana."