Grief spans the globe

Town farewells its hero

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Private Tim Aplin, Ben Chuck and Scott Palmer were killed in action when their helicopter crashed during a commando-led mission in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, minutes before they were to be inserted into battle, in the early hours of 21 June.

In the dark and cramped confines of one of three helicopters they prepared themselves and their equipment for the mission ahead. But, the balance of uncertainty and chance was tipped against them and the helicopter crashed, killing the three Australian commandos and an American serviceman.

Seven Australians were badly wounded in the incident.

**Private Tim Aplin**

To his family he was an outstanding dad and to his mates he was a tower of strength.

Private Timothy James Aplin was farewelled by relatives and comrades at a service at St John's Cathedral in Brisbane on 5 July.

Private Aplin was borne into the cathedral on the shoulders of his brothers in arms through an honour guard of students from Brisbane Boys College. His friend, Michael Kruger, said his departed mate was too big for the coffin in which he lay.

“His smile was bigger than that, his heart was bigger than that,” Mr Kruger said.

“Through his deeds and actions, Ben has become a son of our nation. The six years he spent with the commandos were the best of his life,” Gordon Chuck said.

To his family he was an outstanding dad and to his mates he was a tower of strength.

Such was Private Aplin’s determination to become a commando that upon passing selection he willingly gave up his sergeant’s rank from a former mustering.

“He wanted to show the young guys that they had to keep up with us, not the other way around,” a fellow commando said.

A relative, Wendy Gunnell, read a poem written by Private Aplin’s wife Natasha.

“I may never receive a medal or march on Anzac Day, but I stand tall in the quiet knowledge I too have a role to play,” Ms Gunnell read.

I am a silent soldier – I am a commando’s wife. No uniform, nor rank, just pride in knowing I live a commando’s life.”

**A nation’s son hailed**

Private Benjamin Chuck was farewelled as a hero in a moving funeral service at Yungaburra in far north Queensland on 1 July.

The funeral for the 27-year-old from 2 Commando Regiment was attended by hundreds of friends, family, colleagues and dignitaries.

Private Chuck, or ‘Chucky’ as his mates called him, was given full military honours. His coffin was escorted on a gun carriage through a guard of honour comprising soldiers from 2 Commando Regiment, 1RAR and 51 Far North Queensland Regiment.

Many of his comrades flew in from Afghanistan for the service, with his closest mates serving as pallbearers.

Eulogies from Pte Chuck’s family included tributes from parents Gordon and Susan, and brother Jason.

“Ben has been called many things over the past few days – a great mate, a man of honour, a fine Australian, even a hero – but the one I like the most is ‘our son’,” Private Chuck’s partner, Tess Crane, wrote.

Private Chuck’s mates remembered a professional, dedicated soldier who worked tirelessly for others on his team and was courageous under fire.

Private Chuck, a former crocodile handler, joined the special forces in 2004.

He had a passion for helicopters and had recently obtained a private pilot’s licence. Fittingly, as a volley of shots finished echoing across the lake, a helicopter flew overhead and performed an aerial salute, hovering just metres from mourners in a sign of respect and a reflection of the soldier’s love of the aircraft.

**A nation’s son hailed**

Words Lieutenant Jessie Place

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Soldiers remembered fallen colleague Private Nathan Bewes as a man who loved his job, his battalion and his mates. Memorial services from the Middle East to Brisbane marked the fallen warrior's journey home following his death in an IED blast while on patrol in the Chora Valley region of Uruzgan province on 9 July.

A ramp ceremony at Tarin Kowt on 12 July began the journey home where his mates from 6RAR and Mentoring Task Force 1 (MTF 1) farewelled the 23-year-old described as the epitome of the Australian soldier.

More than 1500 Australian, coalition and Afghan soldiers lined the route as an ASLAV carried his body to a waiting Hercules. Commander MTF 1 Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Jennings said Private Bewes was a soldier who displayed absolute courage and commitment to his job.

"Nate embodied all of what we seek in an Australian soldier," he said. "He had the moral courage to go out almost every day into harm's way and the self-discipline to continue doing so despite the dangers that he faced – this ethos is the mark of the Australian soldier."

The reality of the soldier’s death for loved ones and mates back home was fully realised when eight 6RAR soldiers bore him to waiting family at RAAF Base Amberley on 15 July. Commander 7 Brigade Brigadier Paul McLachlan said Private Bewes was a lead scout who made the path clear for his mates.

"We only put our best out front," Brigadier McLachlan said.

A crowd of more than 1000 at Gallipoli Barracks remembered Private Bewes during a 6RAR Memorial Service on 16 July attended by his parents Gary and Kaye, sister Stephanie and partner Alice Walsh.

His family said the Army was his passion and all he wanted to do. They said he was a loyal friend who cared for his mates.

"Nathan just loved to look after people – at his 21st birthday party we could not get over the camaraderie. We could not believe that such mateship could exist between young men in this day and age."

In a statement, Alice Walsh said Private Bewes was an amazing friend and was loved by all.

"Nate was my best friend, my soul mate, the one I knew I’d be with for the rest of my life."


He was laid to rest in the northern New South Wales town of Murwillumbah on 22 July 2010.