

“ ONE FRIENDLY KIA ”

WORDS BRIAN HARTIGAN PICS ADF

“It’s my sad duty to inform you of the death of an Australian soldier while on operations in Afghanistan.” Chief of Defence Force Air Marshal Angus Houston delivered the dreaded message that had for a long time been feared – yet was surely inevitable.

Trooper David Pearce, 2/14 Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry), serving with the Reconstruction Task Force, was killed and another soldier seriously wounded when a roadside bomb detonated next to their vehicle in Oruzgan Province on the morning of 8 October.

The men were part of a patrol returning from an engineer reconnaissance task and were 6km from their base at Tarin Kowt when the incident occurred.

In the immediate aftermath of the explosion, other members of the patrol secured the scene and provided assistance to the crew of the stricken vehicle.

Despite their best efforts, Trooper Pearce died as a result of the blast, while the

wounded soldier was provided immediate first aid and evacuated to the nearby International Security Assistance Force medical facilities by helicopter. His wounds were initially classified as serious but not life-threatening.

Trooper Pearce was the driver of the vehicle that was hit.

Two days after the blast, members of Trooper Pearce’s unit, the Reconstruction Task Force and their Dutch colleagues farewelled their fallen comrade’s remains from the theatre of operations in a moving and fitting ‘ramp ceremony’.

Lance Corporal Michael Crossley, commander of the stricken vehicle – himself bearing scars from the attack – lead the pall bearers who carried the casket to the C-130 waiting to take Trooper Pearce on the first leg of his long journey home.

The ramp ceremony provided a last opportunity for soldiers in Tarin Kowt to farewell their mate before they returned to their difficult and dangerous duties.

... the words that wrenched the hearts of colleagues and commanders on foreign soil – and a stricken family back home.



Trooper David Pearce, 41, was born in Liverpool, New South Wales, and enlisted in the Australian Army Reserve in 2002. Following a period of Reserve service he transferred to the Australian Regular Army in July 2006 and was posted to the Brisbane-based 2/14 Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry) in October 2006. He had been in Afghanistan for only a couple of weeks when he was killed.

Trooper Pearce had previous operational experience having deployed to the Solomon Islands on Operation Anode with 9 Battalion, Royal Queensland Regiment, in 2005–2006.

He is survived by his wife and two children.

Statement on behalf of David Pearce's family:

"David Pearce spent 18 wonderful years with his wife and had two beautiful daughters aged 11 and 6 years, who were the love and centre of his life.

"David joined the Army relatively late in life.

"After three years with the Army Reserve, including a tour of Solomon Islands, he joined the Regular Army at the age of 39.

"With his life experience, outgoing personality and ability to relate to people of all ages, he was a popular and respected member of his unit.

"He was a patriotic Australian and loved his work with the Army, particularly the comradeship he developed with his mates."

Trooper Pearce's remains were returned to Australia aboard a C-17 Globemaster for a private repatriation ceremony at RAAF Base Amberley. A guard and bearer party from the 2/14 Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry) carried the casket from the aircraft.

Trooper Pearce's family and closest friends were present for the solemn occasion.

A funeral service with full military honours was attended by hundreds of mourners, including family, friends, colleagues, politicians and military leaders at Brisbane's Cathedral of Saint Stephen on 17 October.

Despite the tragic loss, Australian soldiers alongside their Dutch and Afghan colleagues in Tarin Kowt are back to business as usual and, as Air Marshal Houston has reiterated on numerous occasions, they face the same dangers and challenges that cost the life of their colleague and close friend.

"Afghanistan remains a very dangerous place and Taliban extremists see International Security Assistant Force efforts as a direct threat to their continued existence," he said.

"We've said all along that, with a very high threat, casualties are likely. It's something we work against all the time – that's why we have the Counter IED Task Force, that's why we work so hard on our tactics, techniques and procedures, that's why we work so hard on modifying our vehicles – to ensure that we have the best technology available to counter these lethal weapons.

"We do the best we can, but, we work in an extremely dangerous environment and casualties will occur from time to time.

"That's a threat we have been living with, it's a threat we've been working against but, unfortunately, on this occasion, the adversary got through with a successful strike."

Lance Corporal Michael Crossley (Vehicle Commander V30E RTF-3)

"Poppy always said that if he died tomorrow he would be happy because he had lived such a great life.

"While no one likes death or dying, Poppy never had any regrets about his life. Poppy always lived life to the full.

"Poppy loved his family and the Army, and I know that he was doing what he loved when he died. He was an inspiration to all he met and no words can describe the loss that will be felt by all that had the honour of knowing him.

"Our thoughts will always be with his family and we will always be there for them.

"Gone but never forgotten."

Sergeant Justin Smith (Troop Sergeant, Cavalry Troop, RTF-3)

"As his Troop Sergeant and commander of the patrol that was hit, I will never forget that moment when I heard the words, "one friendly KIA", and my heart sank as I saw Poppy lying there at the back of his car, at peace.

"He must never be forgotten, like all Australian soldiers before him who have paid the ultimate sacrifice to better other people's lives.

"Poppy you brought wisdom to our troop. Your commitment to your buddies and your humour will be sadly missed. I will miss your cheese-spread sandwiches and our many conversations we had – not as soldiers, but as proud fathers of young girls.

"I cannot speak any words to ease the pain for your family and friends, mate, but be sure to know that we as a troop will forever honour you and your family as part of our family."

Lieutenant Gavin Vague (Troop Leader, Cavalry Troop, RTF 3)

"You could not find any other individual who adequately sums up the legacy of the Australian soldier.

"A brave, motivated, hardworking and loyal soldier. A true character that could bring a smile to the men during the hardest of times.

"He will be dearly missed by all who have had the privilege and pleasure of working with him. From the men of the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment, his sacrifice will never be forgotten, his commitment to the job will be carried on, and above all, his love for his family will always be remembered.

"This tragic incident will not blur our focus, will not prevent us from helping others nor looking after our mates. Poppy's drive to do what is good and what is right will ensure the men of the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment will succeed in completing our mission.

"My thoughts are with the family and friends of Pops throughout this difficult time.

"I am proud to have served with such a man."





SAS LOSES ONE OF ITS FINEST

DEATH OF A HERO

October 2007 will go down as a dark month for the Australian Defence Force with the deaths of two respected and professional soldiers – **killed in action**

WORDS BRIAN HARTIGAN PICS ADF



SAS memorial 'The Rock' at Swanbourne Barracks, home of the SAS



IT'S A VERY SAD DAY THAT THE NATION HAS LOST A MAN OF THIS CALIBRE

On 25 October 2007, Sergeant Matthew Locke, serving with the Special Air Service Regiment in Oruzgan Province in southern Afghanistan was shot in the chest while engaged with the enemy during an operation close to the Australian base.

Operation Spin Ghar, an operation involving Australian, ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces, targeted the Taliban in their sanctuaries and was designed to drive them from the area around Tarin Kowt in Oruzgan Province.

Sergeant Locke was shot in the chest during a firefight in the Chora Valley on the first day of the operation. His colleagues administered first aid on the scene and summoned an on-call medical-evacuation helicopter, which took the Aussie soldier to a nearby coalition medical facility. However, despite the best efforts of the highly trained soldiers on the ground and the medical staff in the evacuation chain, Sergeant Locke could not be revived.

Chief of Army Lieutenant General Peter Leahy said Australia had lost a genuine hero.

Sergeant Locke was awarded the Medal for Gallantry, one of the country's highest military honours, in December last year for his actions under heavy fire during his first tour of Afghanistan in 2006.

"The nation has lost a genuine hero – the Army has lost a gallant and respected soldier – our Special Air Service Regiment has lost a comrade and a mate," Lieutenant General Leahy said.

"Sergeant Locke was a great soldier, one of those inspirational leaders who knew his duty and knew his task.

"It's a very sad day that the nation has lost a man of this calibre."

Chief of Defence Force Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston said Sergeant Locke exemplified the extraordinary valour we have come to expect from the Special Air Service Regiment.

"Sergeant Matthew Locke was everything you would expect of an Australian soldier. He was courageous, dedicated and very

BIOGRAPHY

Sergeant Matthew Locke enlisted into the Australian Regular Army on 11 June 1991. After completing recruit training at Kapooka, he was allocated to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps and commenced Initial Employment Training at Singleton, NSW, after which he was posted to 5/7 Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment.

Matthew had a flair for infantry training and while he was at 5/7RAR, he completed driver, basic mortar and promotion courses and became a small-arms coach.

It was obvious he wanted to be challenged as a soldier so, in November 1997, Matthew successfully completed the Special Air Service Selection Course. Over the next two years, he completed another 15 specialist courses including patrolling, demolitions, diving, parachuting and medical.

He was posted to the 3rd Special Air Service Squadron.

During his service in the ADF, Matthew Locke was awarded the Medal for Gallantry, the Australian Active Service Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Australian Defence Medal, the United Nations Medal with the United Nations Transitional Authority East Timor Ribbon, the Iraq Clasp to the Australian Active Service Medal, the International Coalition Against Terrorism Clasp to the Australian Active Service Medal, the Infantry Combat Badge and the Returned from Active Service Badge.

professional. He took great pride in being an Aussie digger, displaying the characteristics of loyalty, mateship and determination for which Australian soldiers are renowned," he said.

Soldiers from the Australian Special Operations Task Group and the Reconstruction Task Force farewelled their fallen comrade during a Ramp Ceremony at Tarin Kowt.

His remains were escorted by colleagues on the military flight back to Australia.

Upon arrival at RAAF Base Pearce, Western Australia, SAS soldiers formed a guard and bearer party on the tarmac before carrying the casket from the C-130 Hercules to a private room for a solemn and dignified ceremony.

Sergeant Matthew Locke was buried in a private funeral service, with full military honours, in Perth on 2 November 2007.

He will be memorialised on 'The Rock' at Swanbourne Barracks, along with more than 40 comrades killed on duty with the SAS in its 60 years of service.

MEDAL FOR GALLANTRY

Sergeant Matthew Locke was awarded the Medal for Gallantry in December 2006. The citation reads – For gallantry in action in hazardous circumstances as the second-in-command of a Special Air Service Regiment patrol in the Special Forces Task Group whilst deployed on Operation Slipper, Afghanistan, in 2006.

During the conduct of an operation, a patrol, with Sergeant Locke as second-in-command, were tasked with establishing an observation post in extremely rugged terrain overlooking an Anti-Coalition Militia sanctuary. After an arduous 10-hour foot infiltration up the side of the mountain, the patrol was called in to action to support elements of the Combined Task Force Special Forces patrol that were in contact with the Anti-Coalition Militia in the valley floor to their north. After the engagement, Sergeant Locke's patrol remained in their location and was the only coalition ground element with visibility of the target area.

During the course of the next day the patrol continued to coordinate offensive air support against identified Anti-Coalition Militia positions in order to further disrupt and degrade the enemy's morale. During the afternoon, the observation post became the focus of the Anti-Coalition Militia who made repeated attempts by day and night to overrun and surround the position. In one such incident the Anti-Coalition Militia attempted to outflank the observation post and Sergeant Locke, without regard for his own personal safety, led a two-man team to locate and successfully neutralise the Anti-Coalition Militia in order to regain the initiative and protect his patrol from being overrun.

This particular incident was followed by another Anti-Coalition Militia attempt to manoeuvre to attack the patrol observation post from another flank. Sergeant Locke, again with little regard for his personal safety, adopted a fire position that was exposed on high ground which dominated the planned Anti-Coalition Militia assault. Whilst deliberately exposing himself to intense



Sergeant Matthew Locke is presented with the Medal for Gallantry by the Governor General – 1 December 2006

rifle and machinegun fire from the Anti-Coalition Militia, he again neutralised the lead assaulting elements whilst suppressing other Militia until the arrival of offensive air support. Whilst still under sustained fire, Sergeant Locke then directed indirect fire to effectively neutralise another Anti-Coalition Militia advance on his patrol's position. The courageous and gallant actions of Sergeant Locke were instrumental in regaining the initiative from the Anti-Coalition Militia and allowing the successful exfiltration of the patrol on foot prior to first light the next day.

Sergeant Locke's actions of gallantry whilst under enemy fire in extremely hazardous circumstances, displayed courage of the highest order and is in keeping with the finest traditions of Special Operations Command-Australia, the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force.





LAID TO REST

PICS CORPORAL CHRIS MOORE



"TO HAVE HIS RELATIVES HERE, AND THE CLOSURE IT GIVES THEM, IS JUST FANTASTIC"

The remains of the Diggers were discovered during excavations for a pipeline last year. Two were identified from DNA – Sergeant George Calder, of the 51st Battalion, and Private John Hunter, of the 49th Battalion. The Australian Army flew the descendants of both men to Belgium for the re-interment ceremony.

An inscription on Private Hunter's headstone best sums up the meaning of the event; "At rest after being lost for 90 years".

Commanding Officer 51FNQR Lieutenant Colonel Paddy Evans said it was a tremendous honour for the regiment to provide the ceremonial guard for the reinterment.

"This doesn't happen very often, and to find one of your own from history who was in the original 51st, is like we've gone full circle.

"To have his relatives here, and the closure it gives them, is just fantastic," he said.

As the coffins were eased into the ground, the sky again turned a gun-metal grey and there were spatters of rain – appropriate symbolism as the campaign in which the five Australians perished became mired in mud in October 1917.

Earlier in the day, some 51st Battalion members took part in an Anzac service at Tyne Cot Cemetery as part of 90th anniversary commemorations of the Battle of Passchendaele.

Mists parted and the sun shone brightly the moment soldiers from the 51st Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment, slow-marched one of their own and four Digger mates to newly dug graves on a former battlefield in Belgium.

A 21-strong contingent ensured the five World War I soldiers, including one from the original 51st Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, received a funeral with full military honours.

Sergeant Rick Leeman said it was fitting that the sun pierced the gloom as the first coffin was carried into the Buttes New British Cemetery.

"Every Aussie loves the sun – it couldn't have felt better," he said.

The five casualties of the Great War were buried in the presence of Australian Governor General Major General Michael Jeffery, New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, recent Kiwi Victoria Cross winner Corporal Bill Apiata, Vice Chief of the Australian Defence Force Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie and a crowd of more than a thousand.



Marlena Jeffery, the Governor General's wife, placed sprigs of wattle on the coffins, which were adorned with Australian national flags, slouch hats, 303 bayonets and WWI medals.

Chaplain Jim Pearson, 51FNQR, conducted the service. He and Sergeant Noel Chillego tipped sand and seawater from Albany, Western Australia – the embarkation point for WWI soldiers destined for the Western Front – on the coffins as they were lowered into the ground.

The Governor-General said that 90 years ago, almost to the day, the five soldiers died in a "savagely but successful battle" to capture Polygon Wood, in which the Buttes cemetery is now located.

"It's hard to imagine standing here in this beautiful, productive countryside that in 1917 not a tree, not a blade of grass, not an animal or a bird, or indeed a building, was left standing," he said.

"We commit the bodies of these five Australian soldiers to permanent rest in this beautiful and sacred place, to lie at peace alongside their mates, ordinary men who did such extraordinary things."

