



**Private Luke Worsley, an Australian Commando serving with the Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan, was killed in battle with the Taliban on 23 November 2007 – the third Australian in-theatre fatality in two months.**

**D**ead at age 26, there's no doubt Luke Worsley died doing what he loved – serving on operations with his mates.

There's also no doubt that Private Luke Worsley was a very fine soldier – the accolades and powerful words of family, friends, commanders and colleagues attest to that.

"Luke was sometimes called 'Mr 110 per cent', his brother-in-law Tim told almost 1000 mourners packed in to St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney for the funeral service on 4 December.

"That's part of the reason Luke loved his job in the army so much – he wanted to be the best soldier possible – and serve with the best – and that's exactly what he did."

In an earlier media statement, his family said that although they were devastated at Luke's loss, they knew the Army was his chosen profession.

"We are extremely proud of our boy and we know that we lost him doing a job he was trained for and loved doing.

"When he was growing up, we would never have thought of Luke as a soldier.

"But, he loved the Army, its discipline, training and spirit.

"Luke had strength of mind, body, character and will.

"The Army was the life Luke wanted and he was happy.

"Our son chose his profession and, as fate would have it, he paid the ultimate sacrifice."

Private Luke Worsley enlisted into the Australian Regular Army in October 2001 and, after completing recruit training, was allocated to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps.

After completing Initial Employment Training at Singleton he was posted to the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, in Townsville and was deployed to East Timor.

After two years with 1RAR, Luke was looking for a new challenge and applied for selection with 4RAR (Cdo). He was successful, and went on to complete the commando suite of courses, qualifying in 2004.

Luke deployed with Delta Commando Company Group to Afghanistan in 2006. On return from this first rotation, he was posted to Bravo Company and redeployed to Afghanistan in September 2007.

About half way through this deployment, Luke participated in an Australian Special Operations Task Group action against a known enemy compound.

Chief of Defence Force Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston said the assault followed several weeks of monitoring and intelligence gathering and targeted Taliban leaders and

their supporters in Oruzgan Province as well as an identified bomb-making facility.

"No other Australian troops were killed or wounded in this protracted engagement, during which our soldiers acquitted themselves magnificently. [The engagement] was characterised by heavy, close-quarter fighting," he said.

Private Luke Worsley was first through the door at the bomb factory and was met by heavily armed enemy who opened fire, killing him almost instantly.

The ensuing battle, which lasted several hours, resulted in no further Australian casualties, but a large number of enemy were either killed or captured.

"We are taking the fight to the Taliban. We're going after these bomb makers. We're going after their leadership," Air Chief Marshal Houston said.

"We will not rest from that task.

"But, any time you take the fight to the enemy, any time you conduct offensive operations, from time to time you will take casualties."

Private Worsley's remains were returned to his family in a solemn ceremony at RAAF Base Richmond, before the public funeral service in Sydney.

His parents, John and Marjorie Worsley thanked Defence for their support, kindness

and attention to detail, all of which had made a very difficult time more bearable.

"Luke's military family has been so kind and generous to us in the days since Luke died.

"When they brought our son home, no detail escaped their attention.

"We had feared the grief of the day would be too much to bear, but instead, the dignity of the occasion made us stronger.

"Since the death of our son, we have been overwhelmed by the kindness of a number of people who have assisted us through this difficult time.

"We've received lovely messages from many people, including Luke's army mates. They have been kind enough to tell us about how Luke could always be relied upon to lift people's spirits and encourage them to go farther when they'd had enough.

"Our family is so proud of all our soldiers. They were Luke's mates, his comrades, and they entrusted each others' lives into each others' hands and did the best they could for each other.

"They are bonded. It's something money can't buy.

"Luke was only one of our soldiers and they're all the same – they're all equal – they're wonderful and they represent this country."



After completing his IET course at Singleton, Luke Worsley presented the following poem to his father. It was read during the proud soldier's funeral service.

**'The Final Inspection'**

The soldier stood and faced God – which must always come to pass. He hoped his shoes were shining just as brightly as his brass.

"Step forward now, you soldier. How shall I deal with you? Have you always turned the other cheek? To My Church have you been true?"

The soldier squared his shoulders and said, "No, Lord, I guess I ain't, because those of us who carry guns can't always be a saint.

I've had to work most Sundays and at times my talk was tough and sometimes I've been violent because the world is awfully rough.

I know I don't deserve a place among the people here – they never wanted me around, except to calm their fears.

If you've a place for me here, Lord, it needn't be so grand, I never expected or had too much, but if you don't, I'll understand."

There was a silence all around the throne, where the saints had often trod, as the soldier waited quietly, for the judgment of his God.

"Step forward now, you soldier, you've borne your burdens well. Walk peacefully on Heaven's streets, you've done your time in Hell."

# LOST HIS LIFE IN BATTLE

WORDS: BRIAN HARTIGAN  
PICTURES: SERGEANT KATRINA JOHNSON



**WE ARE EXTREMELY PROUD OF OUR BOY AND WE KNOW THAT WE LOST HIM DOING A JOB HE WAS TRAINED FOR AND LOVED DOING**



# MAY HE REST IN PEACE

A soldier serving with the 2RAR Battalion Group in Timor-Leste was found dead in his room in Dili on 5 November.

**C**hief of Defence Force Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston said Private Ashley Baker had died of a single gun-shot wound while in a barracks area.

"A full investigation will be conducted by staff of the Australian Defence Force Investigative Service," Air Chief Marshal Houston said.

"Additionally, a formal CDF Commission of Inquiry will be completed, consistent with new military justice arrangements.

"Any death of an ADF member is a tragic and sad loss for the entire ADF community."

Private Baker, was a member of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, since November 2006.

He was 19 years old.

Private Baker's funeral was held in his home town of Calliope, near Gladstone,

north of Brisbane, his coffin carried by members of the 42nd Battalion, Royal Queensland Regiment, into the local RSL Hall.

Mourners at the funeral were joined by Chief of Army Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, Commander 1st Division Major General Richard Wilson, Commander 3rd Brigade Brigadier John Caligari and Regimental Sergeant Major of the Army Kevin Wood.

The congregation remembered Ashley and celebrated his life and the career he loved.

Captain Lachlan McKenna and Corporal Norman Donaire from 2RAR spoke about the soldier who was highly regarded by those who served with him.

"Our heartfelt sympathies are with his family and friends at this difficult time," Lieutenant General Leahy said.

Major General Wilson spoke of Private Baker as a dedicated and professional soldier.

"Ashley was a well-respected and valuable member of 2RAR, and we are saddened by his loss," he said.

Private Baker's remains were taken by gun carriage, escorted by his mates from 2RAR, and buried with full military honours in the presence of family and close friends.





# FALLEN ANGEL RETURNS

WORDS BRIAN HARTIGAN  
PICS CORPORAL NEIL RUSKIN

Lance Corporal John Gillespie, a medical assistant with 8 Field Ambulance killed during an ill-fated helicopter medical-rescue mission in Vietnam, has finally been brought home 36 years after his death.

In the presence of his widow Carmel Hendrie, and daughter Fiona Pike, soldiers of the 1st Combat Services Support Battalion solemnly carried a casket containing the remains of Lance Corporal Gillespie to a waiting RAAF C130 at Hanoi International Airport for his belated return to Australia in December.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Alan Griffin said the ramp ceremony was a fitting tribute for a fallen soldier.

"Today's ceremony marks army medic Lance Corporal Gillespie's final journey home after being killed in action in 1971," he said.

"His family and comrades have been able to receive his remains in a dignified and respectful fashion."

**"TODAY'S CEREMONY MARKS ARMY MEDIC LANCE CORPORAL GILLESPIE'S FINAL JOURNEY HOME AFTER BEING KILLED IN ACTION IN '1971"**



Minister Griffin thanked the government of Vietnam for facilitating the recovery of Lance Corporal Gillespie's remains and thanked Jim Bourke and his Operation Aussies Home colleagues for their tireless efforts in locating the crash site.

"This final journey will be one of healing for Lance Corporal Gillespie's family and it has been an honour to share this with them.

"Soon, Lance Corporal Gillespie will be laid to rest at home, where his family can say the goodbyes that have been denied them for so long."

Lance Corporal Gillespie was killed when the 9 Squadron Huey he was travelling in was shot down over South Vietnam on 17 April 1971 during an attempted evacuation of a wounded South Vietnamese soldier in the vicinity of the Long Hai hills near Vung Tau. The aircraft came under heavy fire and crashed.

On impact, the helicopter caught fire and Lance Corporal Gillespie was trapped in the wreckage. The intensity of the blaze, which kept would-be rescuers at bay, was also thought to have consumed the soldier's remains.

Intense fighting in the area prevented further retrieval attempts.

A group of former servicemen under the banner 'Operations Aussies Home' have long been dedicated to finding and repatriating the remains of six Australian servicemen left behind in South Vietnam after Australia withdrew from the country.

Lance Corporal Gillespie's return marks the third success for the group after the remains of Lance Corporal Richard Parker and Private Peter Gillson were returned to Australia for burial in June 2007 – 42 years after being listed MIA (see p18, CONTACT #15).