

Grief spans the globe

BY SGT ANDREW HETHERINGTON

The lives of 2 Combat Engineer Regiment fallen warriors, Sappers Jacob 'Snowy' Moerland and Darren 'Smitty' Smith, were remembered with affection at memorial services in Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates and Brisbane.

The pair were killed when an IED detonated during a dismounted patrol in the Mirabad Valley region of Uruzgan province on 7 June.

Sapper Moerland died in the blast. Sapper Smith was aero-medically evacuated but died from his wounds. His explosive detection dog, Herbie, was also killed.

Before their Australian-flag-draped caskets began the long journey home, a memorial service and ramp ceremony was held at Multi-national Base Tarin Kowt on 9 June.

Tears flowed and mates hugged as they tried to come to grips with the tragic loss of the two engineers who died doing what they did best – trying to rid Afghanistan of IEDs for the safety of their mates and the country's people.

Three explosive detection dogs watched quietly, although one whimpered when its handler approached a portrait of Sapper Smith and Herbie.

Town farewells its hero

WORDS ABLE SEAMAN MELANIE SCHINKEL

Gayndah may be a small country town, but the emotional outpouring from more than 2000 community members for their loved and lost young sapper, Jacob 'Snowy' Moerland, was immense.

Family, friends and the tight-knit community of Queensland's oldest town were joined by political and Defence leaders who came to farewell 21-year-old Sapper Moerland at the Town Hall on 17 June.

In a statement, Sapper Moerland's mother, Sandra, said it was always his dream to serve his country and he was very proud to wear the Australian Army uniform.

"Jacob is now home and he can rest in peace. We will never forget his sacrifice," she said.

Gayndah was brought to a standstill as shops in the main street closed for the funeral.

Sapper Moerland's father, Robert, said he was grateful for the community's support.

"He was an upstanding young man who was always putting himself out there for others," Mr Moerland said.



"He respected all people, was dad's mate and loved his mother and sisters to bits – but he loved his fiancée, Kezia, even more. I will miss you, mate."

Commander 2 Combat Engineer Regiment Lieutenant-Colonel John Carey said Sapper Moerland exemplified achievement in the face of adversity.

"No matter how wet, cold, muddy or hot it was, Snowy was in the thick of the task, cajoling or cursing as the situation befitted, but always giving his all – always doing the job the only way he knew how – loudly, and leading from the front," Lieutenant-Colonel Carey said.

As she tried to hold back tears, Sapper Moerland's fiancée, Kezia Mulcahy, read a letter he wrote to her during his deployment to Afghanistan.

"In the darkness you are my light, the shining brilliance that lights my path home," she read.

Sapper Moerland's remains were cremated at a private service on 18 June.

Miss Mulcahy said she planned to bury some of Spr Moerland's ashes at the family property in Woodenbong, NSW, where the couple had planned to wed in November.



Above: Sapper Jacob Moerland's funeral procession.
Right: Sapper Jacob Moerland with fiancée, Kezia Mulcahy.

Tears for devoted man

WORDS ABLE SEAMAN MELANIE SCHINKEL

A grief-stricken and teary-eyed congregation of more than 300 gathered to farewell Sapper Darren 'Smitty' Smith – the first soldier to be killed in action while handling an Australian war dog – at a poignant service in Brisbane.

The service for 26-year-old Sapper Smith, a dedicated soldier, father, husband and son, was held at the Marist Brothers College Chapel, Ashgrove, on 19 June.

Commander 2 Combat Engineer Regiment Lieutenant-Colonel John Carey said that in Sapper Smith's last 20 minutes, he talked of nothing but his wife, Angela, and son, Mason.

"Darren was a committed, passionate, unassuming soldier, father and husband. His first priority in life was his family, and then the Army. He loved Angela and Mason more than anything else in the world," Lieutenant-Colonel Carey said.

Angela Smith said family, friends and mates were gathered to remember all the Darrens they knew – the devoted father of Mason, her loving husband, a son who made his family proud, a dedicated and very professional soldier, a great mate, a larrikin with a wicked sense of humour and mischief, and a man who would do anything for anybody, no matter what the cost.

"Darren had an uncanny empathy with the dogs he cared for, taught and worked



with. He had developed strong ideas on the training and welfare of the explosive detection dogs," she said.

"We often talked about his ideas and what he would like to have seen done to improve training and conditions, and I'm going to work as best I can to make sure Darren's dreams come true."

As *Stand By Me* and *Don't Worry, Be Happy* played, a touching tribute video, compiled by Mrs Smith, was shown and Smitty's favourite Aussie hip-hop band, The Herd, performed Redgum's classic *I Was Only 19*. Too young to understand, Mason called out "Daddy" in excitement as he saw images of his father on the screen.



Sapper Smith with son, Mason



Sapper Smith and Herbie.

Sapper Moerland died in the blast. Sapper Smith was aero-medically evacuated but died from his wounds. His explosive detection dog, Herbie, was also killed.



Sapper Smith's wife, Angela Smith.

Balance of fate

Privates 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.

Remembered for a big heart

WORDS CAPTAIN PETER MARTINELLI

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. "In the past week I have received hundreds of tributes from across the army, words like 'one of our finest NCOs,' an honour to serve with Tim,' indispensable,' Mr Kruger said.

He said Private Aplin was driven by the love for his family.

"Duty makes us do things well. Love makes us do it to perfection," Mr Kruger said. "Tim loved his kids, he was a perfect father."

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."



Above: Fallen heroes farewelled from Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan.

Below: Private Tim Aplin with wife Natasha.



Below: Private Tim Aplin's funeral procession.



A nation's son hailed

WORDS LIEUTENANT JESSIE PLATZ

Privates 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 and was held on the pristine banks of Lake Tinaroo, the commando's favourite childhood place to water ski, sail and spend time with friends.

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.

"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.

"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 her thoughts down for Jason Chuck to read to mourners – "He was my protector, my shield and my guardian angel and I know he's still looking after me. Yes, he died a hero, but he was my hero the moment I saw his face," she said.

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.



Commander Special Forces Major-General Tim McOwan presents Private Chuck's accoutrements to the soldier's family.



A helicopter salute for a fallen soldier and amateur pilot.

Farewell to a warrior

WORDS CAPTAIN PETER MARTINELLI

A funeral service for Private Scott Travis Palmer, 27, was held at Christ Church Anglican Cathedral in Darwin on 10 July, where he was remembered as a warrior, generous in spirit and respected by his mates.

Pallbearers from 2 Commando Regiment ignored stifling heat and carried their mate's flag-bedecked coffin into the cathedral after a procession along the Darwin Esplanade.

The cathedral was filled with family, friends, mates from his former battalion, 5/7RAR, and comrades from 2 Commando Regiment.

He was no saint and never claimed to be but his larrikin nature infected all who knew him, mourners heard.

In a statement released days after his death, Private Palmer's parents Ray and

Pam said he was devoted and loyal.

"Scott was a larrikin who made us laugh, he had mischief in his smile, love in his heart, and was completely generous regardless of circumstance," they said.

John Palmer, a relative, said Private Palmer had a unique sense of humility and a way of turning a bad situation into something bearable.

"He's left us with vivid memories and touched us in a unique way. He's remembered as a hero, soldier, brother, and son."

Other eulogies recalled 'Positive' Palmer's love of training, and his generosity that drove him to commit time to the Young Raiders football team.

"He had a soft spot for young people and those wanting to excel in what they did," 7RAR Chaplain Richard Whereat said. Private Palmer shared his father



Ray's honesty and his mother Pam's compassion, and they saw their son affected by his tours of Afghanistan.

"Their concerns were real and justified – war does affect the human spirit," Chaplain Whereat said. "Ray and Pam were able to see some of those changes in Scott."



Full military honours for a fallen hero.

Passionate soldier gave all

WORDS SERGEANT ANDREW HETHERINGTON AND GRAHAM MCBEAN

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," she said.



"He always made me laugh and I have never loved anyone so much. He was an excellent soldier who was willing to put his life in danger, along with his mates from Team 3, for the people of Australia.

"I will miss my 'Bewes' for the rest of my life."

Born in Kogarah, in 1986, Private Bewes joined the Australian Army in 2005. During his military career he deployed to East Timor in 2006, to Afghanistan in 2008 and again in January 2010.

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

Reports reproduced courtesy of ARMY newspaper



A soldier farewelled from the battlefield.