

# Brothers together Always



**T**wo Australian soldiers serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Mentoring Task Force in Afghanistan were killed by an improvised explosive device in the Baluchi Valley on 20 August. Private Tomas Dale, 21 and Private Grant Kirby, 35, from the Brisbane-based 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment were killed in action during a joint counter-IED operation with soldiers from the Afghan National Army. Two other Australian soldiers were wounded in the explosion, but their wounds were not life threatening. Acting Chief of Defence Force Lieutenant General David Hurley said the soldiers were moving to an observation position in the Baluchi Valley to cover the operation when, at approximately 10.30am local time, they struck an IED. The wounded soldiers received immediate first aid at the scene and were aeromedically evacuated to the ISAF medical hospital at Tarin Kot. The two deceased soldiers were also transferred to the military hospital. The soldiers had dismounted from their Bushmaster protected mobility vehicle

when they were struck. It is not known what triggered the device. The 1<sup>st</sup> Mentoring Task Force farewelled its fallen comrades in a moving ceremony at Multi-National Base Tarin Kot on 24 August before they commenced the long journey home. Commander Joint Task Force 633 Major General John Cantwell said the two soldiers were fondly remembered by their mates during the service – not just as highly regarded soldiers but as brothers to them all. “The service highlighted just how close-knit the soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Mentoring Task Force have become after almost seven months of operations,” Major General Cantwell said. “Tomas and Grant were separated by a few years and had quite naturally fallen into the role of youngest and oldest brothers in their section. “Losing anyone is hard, but losing two people close enough to be considered as brothers in every sense of that word, is especially difficult and it will be a real test for those who need to continue with this fight in their honour.”

“It is an emotional time for them, particularly as they work through their grief and then refocus to get back on with the job at hand. The memorial service was followed by a traditional ramp ceremony with more than 1000 Australian, ISAF and Afghan soldiers lining the road to the Tarin Kot airstrip to pay their final respects as the flag-draped caskets moved past. 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade Commander Brigadier Paul McLachlan was among the many who welcomed the brothers home, at RAAF Base Amberley on 27 August. He paid tribute to the two soldiers and reflected upon the support that had been expressed around Australia. “Today we receive Tomas Dale and Grant Kirby, back into the arms of a grateful nation, back into the heart of their unit, but most importantly back into the care of their family and loved ones,” Brigadier McLachlan said. “Tomas and Grant are now forever engraved in the proud history of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion and their example will inspire generations of Australian soldiers to come.”

## PRIVATE GRANT KIRBY

### True Aussie soldier

**T**he family of Private Grant Kirby issued a statement shortly after the news broke, saying Grant was part of a close and loving family, father Gary and mum Dianne, brothers Shaun and Luke, sister Lauren, and former wife Edwina and their two daughters Isabella (10) and Madeleine (8). “While Grant and I were no longer married, he was very much a part of our family,” Edwina said. “He was a dedicated father and my very close friend. “Grant was always there for our girls and was totally involved in their sports and school events when he was not deployed.” Edwina said Grant was an incredibly honourable person who had an immense amount of pride in his job, serving the country. His sister Lauren said “Grant was one of the boys and, being older, was often called ‘Dad’ by the boys in his unit.” “He was a role model at times and often a mentor to them.” Family, friends and mates were joined by

political and military leaders at St Peter Chanel Chapel in Brisbane’s The Gap on 3 September for a service to celebrate his life. Brigadier McLachlan spoke of conversations he’d had with a number of Grant’s mates, his commanding officer and the family. “The message I got from each of these conversations is pretty much the same – Grant Kirby was a man who everybody loved to be around. His approach to his job, to his family, and his life set him apart from the crowd and made him someone you would seek out from afar,” Brigadier McLachlan said. Private Joe Thompson, a soldier who had been with Grant just a few moments before he died, told the family that Grant embodied the true spirit of the Australian soldier, a man who used humour to get through tough times, who would do anything for his mates and would give everything to a cause he believed in.



## PRIVATE TOMAS DALE

### A ‘Gen Y’ Digger

**P**ivate Tomas Dale’s life was celebrated at a ceremony in Heysen Chapel, Centennial Park, Adelaide, on 8 September. Tomas’ family, friends, and mates were joined by political representatives and senior military personnel as his coffin, adorned with the Australian flag and an iconic slouch hat entered Centennial Park atop the traditional military gun carriage.



The procession was led by drummers of the Australian Army Band Adelaide and flanked by a battalion guard of honour from 6RAR. Private Dale’s family said Tomas loved the Army – it was all he wanted to do from an early age. “He knew the risks of going overseas but he was willing to take that risk for the cause he believed in. “Tomas loved his family, brothers and girlfriend and we all loved him very much and are very proud of him. “He was a great bloke and will never be forgotten. “Tomas would want his colleagues to keep fighting and hope they come home safely. His mates meant everything to him.” Brigadier McLachlan spoke highly of the 21-year-old soldier. “Tom Dale was taken from us early as a young soldier of boundless potential who was living his life as hard as it could be lived, grabbing at every opportunity that came his way and leaving nothing in the



tank,” Brigadier McLachlan said. “Mention Tom Dale’s name to anyone around the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the first response you get is a big smile as they remember what he was like to have around. “In a real-life evolution of the ANZAC soldier, Tom Dale was a ‘Generation Y’ version of the traditional digger character.” The service ended with a lone bugler playing the last post after mourners placed poppies on the coffin.