

RIP SAPPER JAMES THOMAS MARTIN

KILLED BY AN 'ALLY'

Three Australian soldiers were killed and two wounded following an insider attack at Patrol Base Wahab in the Baluchi Valley region of Uruzgan province on 29 August. The attack occurred during the evening inside the confines of their patrol base.

Acting Chief of the Defence Force Air Marshal Mark Binskin said a lone individual wearing an Afghan National Army uniform fired a weapon into a group of Australian soldiers from close range before fleeing on foot.

"Five soldiers were hit in the burst of automatic fire," he said.

"Their comrades made every effort to revive the three soldiers, but their wounds were fatal.

"I cannot begin to describe the overwhelming grief that their families are experiencing but I want them to know that Army and the ADF community share their anguish and we will continue to support them and care for them.

"This is a terrible day for all and our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have been affected by this incident."

Of the two soldiers who were wounded, one wound was described as serious and the other minor, though no other details were given.

While all five soldiers were members of the 3RAR Task Group, all five were normally based at Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera.

Lance Corporal Stjepan 'Rick' Milosevic was 40 years old from the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry). He was on his second tour to Afghanistan and had previously deployed to Iraq.

Private Robert Poate was 23 years old and from the 6th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment and 21-year-old Sapper James Martin was from the 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment – both on their first operational deployments.



Sapper James Thomas Martin

Sapper James Thomas Martin is survived by his mother Suzanne Thomas, his younger brother and sister, Angus and Holly, and his grandparents Lucille and Ralph Thomas.

James Martin was born in Perth, Western Australia, on 1 June 1991. He enlisted into the Australian Army on 24 January 2011 and completed recruit training at the 1st Recruit Training Battalion at Kapooka, near Wagga Wagga, in April 2011.

In May that year, he attended the School of Military Engineering in Sydney and began initial employment training as a combat engineer.

On completion in August, he was posted to the 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment in Brisbane.

On arrival at the 2CER, Sapper Martin became a member of the 7th Combat Engineer Squadron. He completed a number of additional courses including Combat Engineer High-Threat Search, communications and weapon courses.

Sapper Martin, along with the rest of his squadron, force-concentrated in Townsville with 3RAR in early 2012, in preparation for their deployment to Afghanistan.

Sapper Martin was an intellectual soldier who was a quick learner and adapted well to the Army environment. He was respected by his mates and was considered a loyal friend and comrade.

A musically talented individual, he often played base guitar for his mates. He was also an avid follower of Aussie Rules.

Statement on behalf of Sapper Martin's family

James was a very loving son, brother and grandson who, even as he matured, remained very affectionate to those he loved. He was a fantastic big brother and role model to Angus, whom he took to from birth and spent much time together with as they were growing up.

He had a witty sense of humour and a great sense of fun.

RIP LANCE CORPORAL STJEPAN 'RICK' MILOSEVIC

James took pleasure in playing the guitar, he liked to read books regularly and was also an avid gamer. He enjoyed playing cricket growing up and liked to watch a game of AFL with friends or family.

He was very thoughtful, caring and considerate of others. This really showed when selecting gifts for family members on special occasions. James always seemed to be able to choose something perfect, even if it was something totally unexpected by the recipient at the time. The family's bookshelves are peppered with books gifted by James – and Holly's iPod filled with music selected by him.

James was a great communicator and he used every opportunity to transfer new skills and facts on to his family and friends. He never shied away from an intellectual discussion and when opinions were in conflict, he ended up being right most of the time. But he made you like him in the process.

Once James had made his decision to enlist in the Army as a combat engineer, he remained very determined and focused on this goal. He researched his new job and the training required meticulously, raising his level of fitness while waiting to attend basic training.

In his first letter home from Kapooka, when some of his section mates were homesick and discussing pulling out of the training, James wrote to his family, saying, "I would not give up this opportunity for anything" and that, "I will be an Australian Soldier".

James was a wonderful person and he will be sorely missed by his family and anyone who knew him.

We would like to thank everyone who has and will provide support to our family during this difficult time.

Lance Corporal Stjepan 'Rick' Milosevic

Lance Corporal Milosevic, known as Rick to his family and Milo to his comrades, deployed to Afghanistan with the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment Task Group but was from the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment, Queensland Mounted Infantry based in Brisbane, Queensland.

He is survived by his wife and their two children.

Stjepan Milosevic was born in Penrith, New South Wales, in 1972. He enlisted in the Army in 2008. He was posted as a cavalryman to 2/14LHR (QMI) in Brisbane in 2009 on completion of basic training and initial employment training.

His potential was quickly identified and he achieved outstanding results on courses. He was promoted to lance corporal in 2011 and became an ASLAV crew commander. He was a highly qualified soldier with a strong future.

Lance Corporal Milosevic was a much-liked and respected member of his regiment. His leadership and professional abilities stood out in the unit, on the rugby field and on operations.

He was also a devoted family man who will be sorely missed by his family and comrades.

Statement on behalf of the Milosevic family

Rick was a courageous, committed, immensely proud soldier. His desire to serve his country and honour his family saw him join the army at 36.

At Kapooka, Rick was awarded Most Outstanding Soldier, and during his junior leaders' course, he was presented with the award for the Trainee of Merit.



His passion and commitment saw him rapidly promoted to lance corporal.

In his four short years of service he would serve honourably in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Rick was a typical Australian bloke – friendly, with a dry sense of humour and a natural charm. He had a comfortable ease. He would show respect to everyone he met.

We are all proud of what Rick was able to achieve – not only as a soldier, but as a loving partner, devoted father, son and brother.

Our family is now united by grief as we try to come to terms with the loss of Rick. We thank everyone for their heartfelt wishes and messages of condolences.

Rick is survived by his partner, Kelly, daughters, Sarah (8) and Kate (6), mother, brothers and sisters.



RIP PRIVATE ROBERT HUGH FREDERICK POATE



Private Robert Hugh Frederick Poate

Private Robert Poate was a member of the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment Task Group but was from the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, based in Brisbane, Queensland.

He is survived by his parents Hugh and Janny, and his sister Nicola.

Robert Poate was born in Canberra, in 1988. He enlisted in the Army in 2009. On completion of his basic and initial employment training, he was posted as a rifleman to 6RAR.

Private Poate was a highly qualified soldier, having completed specialist training as a Protected Mobility Vehicle driver in 2010 and commander in 2011.

Private Poate was known for having outstanding leadership potential, which led to him completing a promotion course for corporal in 2011.

He will be fondly remembered by his 'brothers by choice' in 6RAR as a larrikin and an incredibly professional soldier.

Private Poate had a reputation for creating mischief without getting caught, and was proud of his family, his military service, his Canberra origins and his red hair, which he vehemently defended as being 'strawberry blonde'.



What the public doesn't see

In Tarin Kot there's a small team of just five RAAF members who look after all the loading and unloading of Australian and charter aircraft that fly in to the base.

One member of this small team is Leading Aircraftman Rodger Ward, who said loading the five caskets on the Hercules was one task he hoped he never had to do again.

"When the bearer parties carried the caskets on to the aircraft and set them down I could see on their faces that those guys were shattered, they were in agony – and I had to go out there and do my job as quickly but as carefully as possible, with all those lads watching me.

"What the crowd doesn't see is that after the aircraft ramp closes, we have to come from behind a curtain and turn the caskets around and strap them in for the journey.

"For ceremonial reasons, the caskets are brought on to the aircraft feet first, and we have to turn them around so that they can also leave feet first at the other end."

LAC Ward said that even though he never actually knew those soldiers, it was very hard not to feel emotional while he was doing his job.

"There's a lot of planning and thought that goes into the task, because the last thing you want is for something to go wrong.

"The aircraft is marked out, so that everything is perfectly symmetrical. The caskets are laid down on lacquered oak shoring and we always use brand new straps to tie them down, just so they look crisp and new and perfect and nothing dirty touches the casket or the flag.

"Even though 99 per cent of people will never see all that, we take a lot of care and pay a lot of attention to detail so that it looks perfect for their mates and their families."

THE LONG ROAD HOME

Lance Corporal Milosevic, Sapper Martin and Private Poate were farewelled by their comrades from Tarin Kot, Afghanistan, on 1 September.

The moving ceremony and procession to the waiting aircraft was also a farewell for two other soldiers killed in a separate and unrelated incident – Lance Corporal Mervyn McDonald and Private Nathanael Gallagher from the Special Operations Task Group, who died in a helicopter crash in Helmand province in the early hours of 30 August.

The poignant refrain of a lone piper playing a lament for the fallen set a solemn tone as many of those assembled were moved to tears.

At the ceremony, commanders paid homage and soldiers remembered fallen mates with heartfelt words.

Then, hundreds of Australian soldiers and their coalition partners lined the route and saluted as a convoy of five vehicles slowly carried the soldiers to a waiting Hercules to begin their final journey home.

The five were returned to their families and comrades on 5 September with moving ceremonies at RAAF Base Richmond in Sydney and RAAF Base Amberley in Brisbane.

At RAAF Base Amberley, the three soldiers killed in the insider attack were received by their families and members of the Australian Army, led by Chief of Army Lieutenant General David Morrison and Commander 7th Brigade Brigadier Greg Bilton.

Lance Corporal Milosevic, Sapper Martin and Private Poate were received by an honour guard and bearer party formed by members of their respective units before their caskets were carried from a RAAF C-17 to their loved ones.

Two military funerals on 12 September saw Lance Corporal Milosevic laid to rest at Mount Gravatt, Brisbane, and Private Poate at the Chapel of Christ the King at his old school, Canberra Grammar.

Sapper Martin was laid to rest in Perth's Karrakatta Cemetery on 18 September.

