

RIP LANCE CORPORAL MERVYN JOHN McDONALD

TWO OF THE BEST KILLED IN A HELICOPTER CRASH

Two soldiers from Australia's 2nd Commando Regiment were killed when an ISAF helicopter crashed in Helmand province on 30 August. Australian Special Operations Task Group and their partnered Afghan National Security Force unit were participating in a targeted mission at the time.

Acting Chief of the Defence Force Air Marshal Mark Binskin said the soldiers were en route to the mission area when their aircraft crashed.

The cause of the crash was not known, but specialist aircraft recovery personnel were quickly sent to the site to ensure information required for an air-crash investigation was appropriately recorded.

Insurgent action was not suspected to have been a factor in the crash.



Lance Corporal Mervyn John McDonald

Lance Corporal McDonald, 32, is survived by his fiancée Rachael, his mother Myrna and stepfather Bernie, and brothers Percy, Roger and Gary.

Mervyn McDonald was born in Carnarvon, Western Australia, in 1982. He joined the Army on 31 May 1999 and was posted to the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment.

He was posted to the then 4th Battalion (Commando), The Royal Australian Regiment, now the 2nd Commando Regiment, in August 2008 on completion of his selection and training course and reinforcement cycle.

Lance Corporal McDonald was on his sixth tour to Afghanistan.

Lance Corporal McDonald was quick witted and brought a positive energy to both his unit comrades and all those who served with him. A dedicated and enthusiastic professional soldier, he was always willing to come forward with ideas and solutions. He was a highly professional soldier, but his quiet nature and humility meant he always deflected credit on to fellow members of his company.

Statement from Lance Corporal McDonald's fiancée Rachael Sprigg-McKinnie

Merv was the warmest guy you'd ever meet. You could see it in his eyes, they had a special sparkle. He was a real Aussie bloke with a passion for his country, especially its natural splendour. Merv could often be found four-wheel driving and going for bushwalks, but really his favourite place was the ocean. Merv just loved being in the water and the beach was his second home, where he could often be found swimming, spearing or barbequing. They were simple pleasures which filled his soul.

But no place brought out Merv's magnificent smile like the west coast of Australia. He had a nomadic childhood in Western Australia and crossing the border into his home state was always a special moment for Merv. His affection for WA was passionately extended to the West Coast Eagles footy club.

Unfortunately Merv's last visit to Carnarvon a couple of months ago was bittersweet, as he made the trek home to farewell his father who recently passed. What gave Merv strength though was his gratitude to be home and with his family.

Merv was the sort of man who always stayed connected with his family. There was never any doubt of the love he had for them and Merv certainly received plenty of love in return. He was also a fantastic uncle who adored his nieces and nephews. Clowning around with the kids, taking them down the beach and simply throwing a ball around gave him joy.

The other side of Merv was the soldier. He loved the Army and being a digger.



Even after several tours, he felt a real sense of duty to return to Afghanistan and he was committed to sharing his experience with his team and 2nd Commando Regiment.

Words cannot express just how proud I am of the service he has given his mates and his country. Merv would be deeply touched by how the Army family has rallied around to support those he loved.

When I first met Merv I was struck by his smile. It was a beautiful, illuminating smile that betrayed his tough-guy exterior.

Merv had an infectious personality and he was simply amazing, on a natural high and unlike anyone else I'd ever known. He had old-fashioned principles and was an absolute gentleman who knew how to treat a lady.

My fiancée changed my world by showing me new ways to think about things and by teaching me how to really experience life and believe in myself. We jammed so much into our 18 months together. Merv never missed a moment. He would stop to look at a rainbow or to smell the coffee.

We were due to be married in Bendigo next Easter Saturday and we were hoping to start a family soon after. Merv would have been a fantastic husband and a wonderful dad.



RIP PRIVATE NATHANAEL JOHN AUBREY GALAGHER

Private Nathanael John Aubrey Galagher

Private Galagher, 23, is survived by his partner Jessie, parents Wayne and Sally and sister Elanor.

John Galagher was born in Wee Waa, New South Wales, in 1989. He joined the Army on 22 October 2007 and was posted to the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. He was posted to the 2nd Commando

Regiment in November 2011 on completion of a selection and training course and reinforcement cycle.

Private Galagher was on his second tour to Afghanistan.

Private Galagher always put in 110% in every thing he did. He had a 'can-do' attitude, always wanting to get the job done and taking everything in his stride. He was an enthusiastic young soldier who was very-well respected by his mates.



Statement from Private Galagher's parents Sally and Wayne, sister Elanor and partner Jessie Feeney

Our dear Nathanael, who was also known as Nate, loved the Army, but it was only one part of what made the man.

Nate was a country boy at heart. The earth surrounding Narrabri was where he was truly at home. He'd grown up in that region, and even though the Army took him from Townsville to metropolitan Sydney, Narrabri was where he truly belonged.

Nate wasn't a 'showy' kind of guy, but rather one who would demonstrate his love through the little things, which meant the world. He was so loving and grateful.

We never heard Nate say a bad thing about anyone. His love for his family was apparent to all.

Easygoing is the perfect word to describe Nate. Nothing was a problem to him. Perhaps it was because he understood what the important things in life were – so little dramas were like water off a duck's back.

Becoming a father was so important to Nate. You've never seen a man so happy to hear the news that he had a baby on the way. We all knew about it well before the traditional three-month wait. Nate's next

great thrill arrived at an ultrasound, where the baby was revealed to be a boy who could carry on his name.

It speaks volumes about Nate that he'd reached his ultimate career goal of joining the 2nd Commando Regiment at such a young age.

Marching out of his training in December last year was one of the proudest moments of his life. We all attended the parade together. Nate was so thrilled to place the green beret on his head for the first time. In fact, he was so caught up in that moment of placing the beret perfectly on his head, we were worried for a couple of seconds that he might forget to salute. But, vigilant to the honour of the occasion, Nate demonstrated his respect in the appropriate way.

We will miss Nate's caring, loving ways and he will always be a hero to all of our family, including his unborn son.

Additional words from Nate's partner, Jessie Feeney

Nate idolised Lance Corporal Mervyn McDonald, who was also killed in the crash. Merv was generous with his experience and shared it with the other boys in the team, especially Nate.

I last saw Nate at the airport when he departed Australia in July. As they were about to walk off to the gate together, Merv turned to me and said, "don't worry Jess, I'll bring him home." While it's under the most tragic of circumstances, Merv is honouring his promise.

My pledge to Nate is that his son will understand the wonderful man who his dad was.

There's no trait of Nate's that I wouldn't want his son to inherit.



THE LONG ROAD HOME



Lance Corporal McDonald and Private Galagher from the Special Operations Task Group were farewelled by their comrades in Tarin Kot, Afghanistan, on 1 September.

The moving ceremony and procession to the waiting aircraft was also a farewell for Lance Corporal Stjepan 'Rick' Milosevic, Sapper James Martin and Private Robert Poate, who were killed in a separate and unrelated incident.

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 Richmond, Lance Corporal McDonald and Private Galagher were received by their families as well as members of the Australian Army, led by Chief of the Defence Force General David Hurley and Special Operations Commander Australia Major General Gus Gilmore.

On 13 September, Private Galagher was farewelled with a large funeral service at St John's Anglican Church, Pilliga, NSW, followed by a private burial.

Lance Corporal McDonald was farewelled in Perth, with a funeral service at Saint Benedict's Catholic Church, Applecross, followed by a private service at the Fremantle Cemetery on 18 September.