

Captain Ben Babington-Browne killed in Afghanistan

A **Military Operations** news article

8 Jul 09

It is with deep sadness that the Ministry of Defence must confirm that Captain Ben Babington-Browne from 22 Engineer Regiment, Royal Engineers, died in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan on Monday 6 July 2009.

The incident took place whilst on takeoff in the Zabul province, at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Mescall, on the afternoon of 6 July 2009.

Two Canadian soldiers were also killed in the crash.

Captain Babington-Browne was working in the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) Headquarters of Regional Command (South) and was visiting FOB Mescall as part of an ISAF team to undertake an engineering survey of the Romanian FOB.



Captain Ben Babington-Browne
[Picture: via MOD]

Captain Ben Babington-Browne

Captain Ben Babington-Browne was born on 17 October 1981 and grew up in Maidstone. After graduating from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and completing the Royal Engineers Troop Commanders' Course he joined 22 Engineer Regiment in April 2007.

He deployed shortly afterwards to Iraq as a Troop Commander in 5 Armoured Engineer Squadron where he quickly showed that he was an exceptionally gifted leader. It was a demanding tour but he thrived in that environment, earning the respect of all who served with him there.

Once Captain Babington-Browne returned from Iraq, he was selected to run the Regimental Junior Non-Commissioned Officers' Cadre; a testing course which trains and prepares Sappers for promotion to Lance Corporal. As Cadre Officer he was an exemplary model of leadership for the Sappers on the course and in many ways will have influenced those young soldiers for the rest of their careers.

He leaves behind his mother Nina, of Maidstone, as well as his brother Daniel.

Captain Ben Babington-Browne's mother Nina issued the following statement:

"Ben is a much loved son, brother and nephew who had a huge personality and will be so missed by his family and friends who are all heartbroken by his untimely death. One of the brightest stars in the firmament has been lost in the line of a duty which was second only to his love for his family and friends. We are all immensely proud of all his considerable achievements in his short life. God bless and keep him."

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Noble Royal Engineers, Commanding Officer 22 Engineer Regiment, said:

"Captain Ben Babington-Browne Royal Engineers was an outstanding officer who had an extremely bright future in the British Army. Everyone in 22 Engineer Regiment is shocked and saddened beyond measure by his tragic death in Afghanistan. It is hard to accept that such a shining light has gone from this world.

"The impact he made on us during the time we were privileged to spend with him showed that Ben will have touched many lives. I

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nope that they can find some small comfort in knowing that we, his comrades-in-arms, hold him in such high regard and feel his loss so keenly.

"I have rarely met a man who was so widely liked and respected in a regiment. On meeting him when I joined 22 Engineer Regiment, Ben immediately impressed me as a man of genuine purpose and penetrating intellect. His humility and selflessness were palpable; he carried his rank lightly and the British Army officers' creed of 'Serve to Lead' could have been written for him.

"He combined these qualities with a warmth, zest for life and sense of fun which could not help but lighten any mood. Above all else, his commitment to his soldiers was total and they knew it. He loved the outdoors and was never happier than when Nordic or Alpine skiing. Such an abundance of good qualities is rare in one person, I can only say that he truly was that man; gifted, compassionate and great fun to serve alongside.

"It is typical of him that he would volunteer for service in Afghanistan after he had finished his time as a Troop Commander in 22 Engineer Regiment. He had an enquiring mind and a nature which sought out personal challenge and the path less travelled.

"I had no doubt at all that he would distinguish himself wherever he served. He was a credit to his family and the many friends who surrounded him. In the midst of our loss we can only imagine the depth of his loved ones' grief, they will forever remain in our thoughts and prayers."

Brigadier Chris Tickell Royal Engineers, Deputy Commander British Forces Afghanistan, said:

"Captain Ben Babington-Browne was a rising star who had stamped his mark early as a Troop Commander in the Royal Engineers. Bright, personable and bursting with energy he had the world at his feet.

"Ben volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan where he felt his talents could best be used. In a very short space of time here he made a huge impression on servicemen of all nationalities and he contributed significantly to the mission. It is immensely sad to lose a man of such unique and manifest talent and our thoughts and prayers are with his family and loved ones."

Brigadier General John Nicholson, Deputy Commander, Regional Command (South), said:

"Captain Ben Babington-Browne was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in April 2003. Prior to joining the Army he was a graphic designer with a very artistic flair.

"As a volunteer as an individual augmentee for Headquarters Regional Command (South), Kandahar, Afghanistan, he deployed in mid-May 2009 for a six-month operational tour of duty as a member of the Engineer Branch, as Staff Officer 3 Engineering Intelligence. Prior to his arrival in Headquarters Regional Command (South) he was a member of 22 Engineer Regiment based at Perham Down near Tidworth Garrison in Wiltshire.



Captain Ben Babington-Browne
[Picture: via MOD]

"Captain Babington-Browne quickly became a solid member of the multi-national Engineer Branch team. He was a positive and energetic officer with a warm, engaging and positive smile. These together with his amazing wit and sense of humour greatly contributed to the morale of the Engineer Branch and the Headquarters at large.

"Captain Babington-Browne had a strong sense of duty, commitment and drive, always seeking to take the initiative

commitment and drive, always seeking to take the initiative, constantly looking for ways to improve things. He was always keen to lend a hand to others in completion of tasks. Captain Babington-Browne was an excellent team player, engineer and officer, being thoroughly professional in every sense.

"Captain Babington-Browne lost his life doing what he loved doing; being an engineer, supporting the mission, striving to help others and serving his country. He will be greatly missed. He leaves a mother and brother and our deepest condolences and thoughts are with them, his family and his friends at this very sad time."

Brigadier Tyrone Urch OBE (Late Royal Engineers), Commander 1st Mechanized Brigade, said:

"The loss of any officer or soldier on operations is a tragedy, but to lose one of such abundant talent, intellect, good humour, professionalism and selflessness makes Ben's loss all the harder to bear. He was an inspiring individual and a truly outstanding leader.

"As his Brigade Commander (and a past Commanding Officer of 22 Engineer Regiment) could I say how much he will be missed by every Officer, Warrant Officer, Non-Commissioned Officer and Private soldier in 1st Mechanized Brigade. Our thoughts will remain with his family, friends and comrades for ever."

Officer Commanding 5 Armoured Engineer Squadron, Major Simon Stockley Royal Engineers, said:

"I would not be the officer and person I am today without Ben's guidance, support, and most of all, his friendship."
Lieutenant Gemma Mason, friend and fellow Troop Commander

"Captain Ben Babington-Browne was quite simply one in a million, and undoubtedly one of the most promising officers that I have had the privilege to serve alongside in my 18 years of service.

"An intelligent and dynamic young officer, he brought with him a great sense of fun, commanding his troop with panache, dash and élan, and his soldiers loved him for it.

"There is no doubt that he dared to be different, a trait that will ensure that his memory will last long in the consciousness of all those that he touched, and there were many. It is fair to say that he considered many aspects of his military career to be 'hilarious', and he approached every day like it was the best day of his life, I am just devastated that there will be no more 'best days'.

"Fleet of mind, but with no hint of arrogance, he would always grasp the key issues quicker than most of us, but to his core he was a compassionate commander who always knew what to say and do. As a Troop Commander I could have asked for none better, and neither could the soldiers he commanded.

"With imagination and flair, he ensured that the training that he delivered was imaginative, realistic and demanding, recognising the need to prepare them for the challenges they would face on future operations. His cosmopolitan outlook undoubtedly broadened his soldiers' horizons, and those who joined him on an expedition to Iceland last summer had the 'trip of a lifetime'; I would have expected nothing less from him.

"My lasting memory of Ben will be of him standing in front of my squadron on Rorke's Drift Day, dressed in his Blue Patrols, waving his sword around whilst emulating Lieutenant John Chard VC, larger than life itself and full of fun. He was the epitome of the squadron motto 'Nil Desperandum' - 'Never Give Up', and he never did.

"My thoughts, and those of my squadron, are very much with Ben's mother and his brother at this terrifically sad time, but they should be immensely proud of what their son and brother represented and achieved in his life. There were none better."

Friend and fellow Troop Commander, Lieutenant Gemma Mason Royal Engineers, said:

"Ben and I spent many weekends as 'mess orphans' in the mess together which was typically 'amazing'. He was known as R3 and

together, which was typically amazing. He was known as Ben and he was a definite character among our peers. We jointly led a hill-walking expedition to Iceland last summer and he loved the eccentricities of Reykjavik and enjoyed every aspect of its arty culture. This interest in anything different and slightly wacky manifested itself in the 'Moustache Tree' that he decorated in the TV room and the old school war posters in his office.

"His dry, quick wit was very different and absolutely hilarious. Very intelligent, he was sometimes somewhat knowingly patronising, but always funny with it. At parties he was usually the first to be up dancing with me to Lily Allen and quoting mad moments he had heard on a Radio 4 comedy sketch.

"Professionally he was an excellent example and mentor, taking me under his wing when I arrived at the regiment. I would not be the officer and person I am today without Ben's guidance, support, and most of all, his friendship. My heart goes out to his family at this tragic time."

Troop Staff Sergeant, Staff Sergeant
Richie Hines, said:

"I'm honoured to have had the pleasure to call him a colleague and a friend. Gone, but never forgotten."

***Lance Corporal Thomas Goodwin,
Section Second-in-Command***

"My Troop Commander, Capt Babington-Browne, was not only the best Troop

Commander I ever had the privilege to work with, but he was also a true friend. In his military life he was an incredibly professional officer in everything that he undertook. 'Troopy' attacked everything with enthusiasm that was not only an example to all, but also with an attitude that I aspired to match.

"What made Troopy different from many officers was that he not only led from the front, as all good officers do, but he led by example, never asking them to do something he would not do himself. He was methodical in everything in his life, whether it was with regards to his military or personal life. He not only portrayed all the qualities that a British officer should, but was able to interact with the soldiers he commanded, gaining their total respect.

"As a Troop Commander he had an amazing sense of humour, something that would lift the troop in the most awkward situations, or break an uneasy silence. As a Staff Sergeant when you are given your Troop Commander you are there to guide, support and mentor him to be a professional officer. This was an easy job for me, as he was the real deal, and I feel he improved me as much, if not more, than I did him.

"Our troop was a family and as the Troop Commander he was the head of that family; he led the family as a head of the household would, with the right balance of discipline and compassion. The nature of service on operations means that soldiers form a bond which is often stronger than that between blood relatives and I felt as though I knew Troopy, Ben, better than some of my own family and I was proud to do so.

"As a friend he was supportive not only to myself but to my family. He had an ability to interact with any person, whether young or old, and would often entertain my children with his amazing sense of humour. He was the life and soul of any party and never failed to make an impact, whether with his hilarious dancing or by telling stories with his characteristic dry wit.

"I will always remember Ben as a true friend and gentleman; simply the best. As a father myself, my thoughts are with his mother and family at this difficult time. I will miss him."

Section Second-in-Command, Lance Corporal Thomas Goodwin, said:

"Capt Babington-Browne will always be remembered by me as a man who personified 5 Squadron. He was 100 per cent professional and full to the brim with squadron spirit. I worked for him for two years and he was always a man you could go to for an honest answer, and a nudge in the right direction.

"We have enjoyed a lot of troop and squadron functions together, and he was always the guy that you wanted on your table. He had a sense of humour second-to-none and his enthusiasm always rubbed off on everyone around him. I had the

pleasure of going on a two-week trip trekking across Iceland with him, which was amazing, and I will never forget it.

"It is impossible to put into words how we are all feeling, but I know he would like us to remember him for all the good times we shared, of which he has left behind more than I can remember. I'm honoured to have had the pleasure to call him a colleague and a friend. Gone, but never forgotten."

Secretary of State for Defence, Bob Ainsworth MP, said:

"The death of Captain Ben Babington-Browne was a real blow, and I was deeply saddened to hear the news. He was a highly respected officer who, through his service in both Afghanistan and Iraq, proved himself to be a gifted leader. Captain Babington-Browne is sorely missed by all his colleagues, but the biggest loss will of course be felt by his family and my thoughts are with them at this time."