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Sister's moving letter to soldier brother Mark Quinsey 'murdered by cowards'

Thursday, 19 March 2009

The sister of a soldier murdered by dissident republicans has described his killers as "cowards".

Speaking during the funeral service of Sapper Mark Quinsey, who was shot dead outside Massareene Barracks in Antrim on March 7, his sister Jaime said she was struggling to come to terms with his murder.

Reading a letter she had written to her brother, the 25-year-old said: "It breaks my heart to think that I will never see you again. What's happened to you is just so hard for me to understand.

"You were the most caring, respectable young lad I knew. You did not deserve what those cowards did to you."

Many of the mourners wore small yellow ribbons in memory of the soldier and the vicar at the church, the Rev Eve Pitts, invited the congregation to applaud his achievements in life.

Earlier, a spontaneous round of applause broke out in the street as the hearse approached the church.

Around 200 people lined both sides of Highters Heath Lane as the coffin was carried by six pall-bearers from 38 Engineer Regiment past a guard of honour formed by members of the Royal British Legion and an eight-man firing party from Sapper Quinsey's regiment.

Army chaplain Rev Colin Butler told the service that Sapper Quinsey (23) of 25 Field Squadron, 38 Engineer Regiment, had been eager to begin to fulfil his huge potential at the time of his death.

Describing the barracks shooting as an act of utter wastefulness, the clergyman added: "The news of Mark's death, and his comrade and friend Patrick, will be for many of us something we'll remember for ever.

"For those of us old enough, emotions to do with the Northern Ireland of the past were reawakened.

"For those who are too young to have such a connection, it must be utterly bewildering.

"What did the perpetrators of this wicked event really think it would achieve? Since it was a deliberate inci

dent, conceived and planned, what did they seek? More deaths, more events like today?

"With the killing of Constable Stephen Carroll perhaps they thought they'd begun their damnable sequence of misery."

But, the chaplain added, the events which came after the killings had followed the opposite course.



Mark Quinsey, one of the two soldiers killed in the attack at Massareene Barracks

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"Whilst it is very difficult to speak of good coming out of Mark's death, I know that his family are pleased at the rejection of these gunmen and their ways.

"We have witnessed an unprecedented coming together in the whole island of Ireland, north and south, in a way that speaks mightily of the people's desire to have peace."

The chaplain also paid tribute to Sapper Quinsey, who was described by his senior officer as selfless, willing and humorous.

He said: "His parents told me and want it said that he couldn't have been a better son. His sister says that he wasn't just a brother but a best friend.

"He was to them all 'simply irreplaceable'."

In a statement read out prior to the funeral by Lieutenant Colonel Roger Lewis, Commanding Officer of 38 Engineer Regiment, Sapper Quinsey's family described how much the soldier was looking forward to his imminent tour of duty in Afghanistan.

They said: "Mark was right at the very heart of our family and we thought he'd be there forever.

"It is so hard for us to understand why this happened to him.

"Mark loved life. He was fun, popular and had a brilliant sense of humour, attracting a large circle of friends who he was very close to.

"He was looking forward to going to Afghanistan — he wanted to prove what he was made of.

"He has been cheated of the opportunity to serve his country, which is what he so desperately wanted to do."

Lt Col Lewis added: "Today is primarily about the Quinsey family saying farewell to Mark.

"It is also a day on which the wider regimental and military family can share with pride some of the zest, energy and fun he brought to the lives of his friends and colleagues.

"The regiment and I are devastated to have lost such a fine and promising soldier."

The congregation was told of the soldier's love of fixing things and that he had always been destined to be a craftsman.

He was a keen angler and was described as Birmingham's answer to Steve Irwin because of his fascination with reptiles and nature.

Inside the church, Lt Col Lewis read out tributes from Sapper Quinsey's comrades, who described how the popular soldier would tell jokes in a "thick Brummie accent", had a great sense of humour and loved partying.

Sapper Quinsey, along with Sapper Azimkar, also of 25 Field Squadron, 38 Engineer Regiment, were killed as they took delivery of pizzas in front of the main gates of their barracks.

They were wearing desert fatigues ahead of leaving for Afghanistan on operations.

Another two soldiers and two pizza delivery men were injured in the attack. The Real IRA has claimed responsibility.

The funeral of Sapper Azimkar (21) from Wood Green, north London, is due to take place tomorrow.

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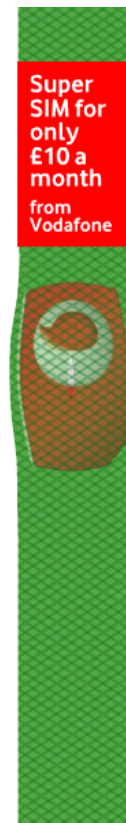
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