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## Family of murdered soldier tell of deep loss at funeral

Saturday, 21 March 2009

The commanding officer of a soldier shot dead by the Real IRA outside Army barracks in Co Antrim has spoken of the young man's desire to help others before himself.

Speaking at the funeral of Sapper Patrick Azimkar (21) at the Guards Chapel on Birdcage Walk in central London, Lieutenant Colonel Roger Lewis said: "Pat was a highly-motivated young sapper who was always willing to go the extra mile and he never ceased to amaze me with his enthusiasm and determination to get the job done."

He described the killing of Sapper Azimkar of Wood Green, north London, and Sapper Mark Quinsey as "callous".

He said: "On the evening of March 7 we suffered a blow of incalculable sadness."

He said the two men were, along with the rest of their regiment, "preparing with quiet determination" to deploy to Afghanistan that night.

More than 100 mourners gathered at the chapel for the service including PSNI chief constable Sir Hugh Orde and Northern Ireland victims commissioner Mike Nesbitt.

The two men died in a hail of more than 60 bullets as men with automatic weapons fired at troops as they collected food at the gates of Massereene Barracks in Antrim on March 7.

Two other servicemen and two pizza delivery men were also injured.

After mourners entered the chapel Sapper Azimkar's coffin arrived carried in a hearse decorated with flowers saying "forever loved" and "Pat". His family followed in the cars behind.

The family stood in solemn silence as six members of the 38th Engineer Regiment hoisted the coffin, draped in a Union flag and topped with Sapper Azimkar's number one dress cap, on to their shoulders and carried it into the chapel.

The congregation, led by Father Michael Dunne, Forces Chaplain and Priest of Westminster Cathedral, sang hymns including I Vow To Thee, My Country and Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.

Sapper Azimkar's uncle, Aiden Ferguson, and cousin, Sam Ferguson, both addressed the congregation, along with Lt Col Lewis.

Father Dunne said the service reflected the Catholic background of Sapper Azimkar's mother Geraldine — whose family were originally from Ireland. He said that there was also a multi-faith element to reflect the background of the young man's father Mehmet, originally from Cyprus.

He spoke of the "astonishingly complimentary" tributes that he had received from all who knew the young man.

The service concluded with The Last Post before the coffin was taken to Haringey for a private interment.

Sapper Azimkar was a keen and talented footballer and his hearse was decorated with a series of footballs fashioned from blue and white flowers.

A statement from the family was issued by the Army after the funeral.

It read: "We are completely devastated by the loss of our beautiful son Patrick. There are no words to describe what this senseless killing has done to our family in taking from us our

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beloved son and brother."

It said the family joined with the people of Northern Ireland in "our sincere hope for a return to lasting peace".

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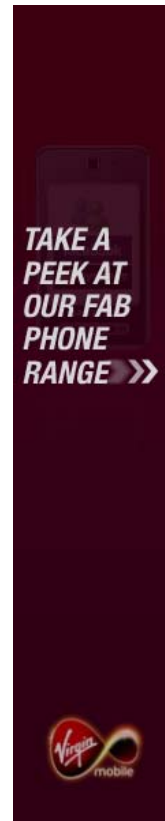
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