



Captain Phillipson on duty in Afghanistan



Afghan soldier was 'unlawfully killed'

A CORONER accused the Ministry of Defence of breaching British soldiers' trust by sending them to Afghanistan without basic equipment.

Andrew Walker was speaking at the end of an inquest last Friday into the death of Captain James Phillipson, aged 29, of 7 Parachute Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, in a firefight with Taliban troops on June 11, 2006, in which British forces were "totally out-gunned".

Capt Phillipson came from Oakwood Road in Bricket Wood and went to St Columba's College in King Harry Lane, St Albans.

The inquest, which was held in Oxford, heard that before his death, 7 Para soldiers complained repeatedly about a lack of proper equipment – chiefly standard night-vision kits and weaponry. Even after his death, the much-needed equipment did not arrive, the hearing was told.

Mr Walker, assistant coroner for Oxfordshire, said: "They (the soldiers) were

defeated not by the terrorists but by the lack of basic equipment. To send soldiers into a combat zone without basic equipment is unforgivable.

inexcusable and a breach of trust between the soldiers and those who govern them."

He recorded a narrative verdict in which he said Capt Phillipson was unlawfully killed.

Anthony Phillipson, Capt Phillipson's father, said after the inquest: "He (the coroner) laid into them (MoD) particularly badly for the lack of equipment.

"I do hold the MoD responsible for James's death but it is not just the MoD, it goes much deeper than that. The Treasury and the then Chancellor, Gordon Brown, will be really to blame for what happened. The MoD was starved of cash by the Chancellor.

"Soldiers should never be sent out under-equipped, the coroner made that

Coroner slams breach of trust which sent officer into battle without the basic equipment

quite clear." Speaking of his son, he said: "James had always wanted to go where the action was."

Capt Phillipson was part of a quick-reaction force dispatched to assist another group of British soldiers who came under fire after they were sent to retrieve an unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicle (UAV) which had come down near their base at Sangin, Helmand Province.

As he ran to help, Capt Phillipson was hit in the temple by a bullet. Cause of death was given as a gunshot wound to the head.

A series of Capt Phillipson's surviving colleagues told the inquest that they were not supplied with the required equipment – night-vision kits and an array of weaponry.

Major Johnny Bristow, Capt Phillipson's commanding officer, agreed this had led to them being "totally out-gunned" by Taliban forces.

The coroner asked Maj Bristow if, had they been supplied with Minimi machine guns and under-slung grenade launchers, they would have been a match for their attackers.

"It would have made a hell of a difference," he replied.

He said there were three or four night-vision kits between as many as 30 men.

Sergeant Jason Tomlinson, of 7 Para, described the lack of kit as "disgusting".

The hearing was told the Taliban forces had multiple rocket-propelled grenade launchers and other firepower.

Major Michael Shervington, of the Parachute Regiment, president of an MoD board of inquiry (BoI) into the death, said: "I do not believe there was a



Captain Phillipson as a Cub

serious shortage of weapons, but yes, there was a shortage."

The BoI report concluded that Capt Phillipson was killed as a result of "poor tactical decision-making", a lack of standard operating procedures and a shortage of "mission-essential equipment".

Mr Anthony Phillipson added: "I came here today with the hope that they would support the Army BoI report, which the coroner did 100 per cent."

The 7 Para soldiers were deployed to Afghanistan to help train soldiers from the Afghan national army with a view to them controlling the Sangin area.

Keeping war hero's memory alive



CAPTAIN James Phillipson, the first soldier to be killed during the second invasion of Afghanistan, is to have his name engraved on a plaque at the St Stephen Parish Council war memorial in April.

Lieutenant James Barry, also from Bricket Wood, who died in the Falklands War in 1982, will also have his name added to the bronze cast plaque to be added to the existing war memorial in Park Street.

Since Captain Phillipson's death, his brother David, aged 28, from Dexter Close in St Albans, has launched a charity in his memory – The Captain James Phillipson Trust – and raised funds by embarking on a sponsored trek through the second largest canyon in the world.

Adam Vanstone, 28, and David Fieldhouse, 30, who were also close to James and students at St Columba's accompanied David on the trek through the Fish River Canyon in Namibia in south Africa. The Trust has raised more than £20,000 so far.

All monies raised will be used to enable under-privileged and disabled children to engage in sports, team work, leadership and motivation exercises. The Trust will also donate to charities which support armed forces personnel and veterans in their times of need.

For further information about the Trust or to make a donation, visit www.captainjim.org

More than 700 people attended Captain Phillipson's funeral at St Albans Abbey in June last year and a separate private service was also held at Garston where an army firing party provided a gun salute.

His old school – St Columba's in King Harry Lane, St Albans – named a newly-constructed building after him. It houses the school's Combined Cadet Force.

Captain Phillipson's name has also been included on an Armed Forces Memorial in Staffordshire which commemorates the lives of more than 15,000 people killed serving Britain since World War Two.