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Dad's tribute to hero Brit

By **TOM NEWTON DUNN**
Defence Editor

A DISTRAUGHT dad yesterday paid tribute to his hero son who became the first British soldier killed in action on a new Afghan mission.

Captain Jim Philippson, a commando-trained Para gunner, was named by the MoD yesterday 48 hours after his death in a bloody shootout.

The 29-year-old was shot at the head of his patrol in a vicious and "opportunistic" Taliban ambush in the lawless south's Helmand province.

Dad Anthony said at the family's home in St Albans, Herts: "We are all trying to come to terms with it. James was a wonderful man. He was brave.

"It's what he lived for. It's our only consolation. He was killed doing exactly what he wanted to do. He could never have worked behind a desk." Young army officers have borne a terrible toll in recent fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Sandhurst-educated Capt Philippson was the fourth to die leading his men since February.

He and his men met a hail of bullets and rocket-propelled grenades as they drove at sunset through a rebel stronghold valley in a desolate opium-swamped province.

Two other soldiers were seriously injured in the ensuing six-hour firefight.

A column of Land Rovers and Apache helicopter gunships rushed to save the stranded patrol.

At least 20 Taliban fighters — including some senior leaders — also died in the battle near the hotspot town of Sangin.



Shot dead ... Captain Jim Philippson

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Mr Philippon revealed his son had just returned from a six-month tour in Iraq when he insisted on being sent to Afghanistan.

The officer's girlfriend is "devastated" by his death because the couple were "very close", he said.

Capt Philippon was also praised by his commanding officer.

Lt Col David Hammond said: "Jim was a rising star. He had a huge amount to offer."

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