

IN MEMORY OF
TROOPER JAMES MUNDAY



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CAROLINE MUNDAY

Interview by Katy Regan

Caroline, 54, from Coleshill, Worcestershire, lost her son, Trooper James Munday, serving in the Household Cavalry Regiment when he was killed driving a jackal, in Helmand province, Afghanistan on 15th October 2008. He was 21.

James was my fourth child, my first with my second husband, Rob. We're a close family and this picture was taken in the conservatory of my parents' house in Coleshill when James was on leave, in April 2005. He loved to visit and was very close to them.

James was seventeen when he signed up at Pirbright Barracks in Surrey - just a baby in his school blazer. Rob and I had to give parental consent. Later, he'd say, "Mum, just remember you signed me in, when I'm lying dying in the sand." He was known for his black sense of humour.

I missed him so much when he was training, that when he called, I'd accidentally cut him off, because I was holding the phone too close with excitement. James excelled in the army and passed out on horseback in Knightsbridge in the Household Cavalry Regiment in 2005, I was so proud. Two years later, he got the chance of promotion from ceremonial to the Armoured Division, which meant he could be called up to fight. I said he was mad to take it, but he wanted the respect that came with going on tour. I knew he was worried that April before he went to Afghanistan. I said, "James, I'll

lock you in your bedroom if I have to but I do understand you have to go." He explained: "Mum, I have my brothers in the army, we work in a chain. If I don't go, there's a link missing." We hugged and said we loved each other, and then he was gone, but I'm just so glad we got to have that conversation, that we understood one another.

At 4.30pm, on Wednesday October 15th 2008 I was just leaving work, at Parcel Force, when I saw my sister had rung (I was living with her at the time) leaving an odd message saying I had to call Mum. Mum was very insistent I immediately go home to her house. I knew something awful had happened. I just felt this blackness come over me as I walked to the car. I thought to myself, "Oh God, James is dead, please let it not be James." I was on my knees in the car park, screaming. I felt like my guts had been wrenched out.

The first thing I said when my parents officially broke the news was "What for?" I supported the soldiers, but I never believed in Iraq or Afghanistan.

I was plunged into hell. I just wanted James - to smell him, touch him. The pain was unbearable. I couldn't believe he was gone.

When his stuff came back in a cardboard box from the army, his boots were on top. On one of them I noticed that the lace had broken and I imagined James touching those laces on the day he was killed and I just sat there, and sobbed. I needed James' things around me, so I got my own flat and basically made a shrine. I'd go and sit there, wearing James' jumper, and just cry.

James was buried in St Peter and Paul's Church, Coleshill. In the madness of grief, I wanted to jump in the grave with him. It makes me feel better to know, I will be buried next to him; that one day, we'll be together again.

Still when I hear on the news about other peoples' sons or husbands have died, it's like I grieve all over again. It still hurts so much and always will. But there is still life, and there is still hope. Soon after James was killed, I heard that people were putting flowers and candles on the war memorial outside our local church, and so decided to go down for comfort. There was a guy there called Phil, paying his respects. He held me, he said: "You're a strong woman. You'll get through this." Slowly, we started seeing one another and on the New Year's Eve following

James' death, Phil rang, and said "you do know I love you, don't you?" Slowly, we started seeing each other. It was a new beginning for me. James' dad Rob and I split up after James went to war even but we had remained close and supportive of each other after James had died. The fact Phil came out of such devastation, still amazes me. It's like he was sent.

I'm proud of James, I am proud of all my kids, my family and particularly myself and Rob. I think if James could see how much his parents have been united, he'd be proud.

I always wear a poppy every day - because every day is Remembrance Day for me. We have a bench at James' grave now and every now and then, I go and light a candle there, it makes me feel close to him. I look at the inscription on the bench and it comforts me "through the tears, our pride shines bright."

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to the Household Cavalry
Foundation please go to
www.hcavfoundation.org



ABOVE

Before: Caroline and her son James at Caroline's parents' house, April 2005, Coleshill, Warwickshire.

RIGHT

After: Same location, April 2013.



Before They Were Fallen deals with remembrance. Louis Quail and Katy Regan use the power of photography and testimony together, to link memory, the passing of time and loss to create a body of work which pays tribute to all those British soldiers who gave their lives in the Afghanistan conflict.



B E F O R E

T H E Y

W E R E

F A L L E N

LOUIS QUAIL

**WORDS BY
KATY REGAN**