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Saturday, March 21, 2009

Funeral told of heroic last moments



The coffin of Sapper Patrick Azimkar arrives at Guards Chapel on Birdcage Walk in central London for his funeral service. Sapper Azimkar was killed along with Sapper Mark Quinsey in an attack at Massereene Barracks in Antrim on March 7th. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA Wire

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FRANK MILLAR, London Editor

PATRICK CENGIZ Azimkar (21) – the second of the two British soldiers murdered by the Real IRA in the attack on Massereene army barracks in Co Antrim – was buried yesterday after a multi-faith funeral service in the Guards Chapel, Birdcage Walk, in central London.

For the second time in three days it fell to commanding officer Lieut Col Roger Lewis to pay tribute to a young sapper “of true grit, determination and long-term promise” whose final selfless act had saved the life of a comrade.

Lieut Col Lewis said Sapper “Fitzy” Fitzpatrick had told him earlier this week: “If it wasn’t for Pat I would not even be here – despite the chaos, he was the one who pulled me to the ground and saved my life.” Lieut Col Lewis added: “Pat’s final act was totally in keeping with the manner in which he lived the rest of his life. It was always to look after the wellbeing of others.”

Sapper Azimkar’s family expressed their thanks for messages of support received from people in Northern Ireland and joined them in the “hope for a return to lasting peace”.

The family said they were “completely devastated” by their loss and that there were “no words to describe what this senseless killing has done to our family in taking from us our beloved son and brother at just 21 years old”.

They continued: "Patrick was generous, loyal and tenacious. He brought great fun into our lives and we will miss him forever. We are thankful for the messages of support we have received from the people of Northern Ireland."

An estimated 400 people joined the family in mourning their loss, many of them from London's Turkish Cypriot community.

Lord Kilclooney (former Ulster Unionist MP John Taylor) attended in his capacity as a past chairman of the Parliamentary Friends of Turkish Cyprus. Chief constable of the PSNI Sir Hugh Orde was present as was the mayor of Antrim, Cllr Oran Keenan. The Government was represented by Kevin Conmy, Chargé d' Affaires at the Irish Embassy in London. Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, was represented by Msgr Phelim Rowland, formerly principal Roman Catholic chaplain to the British army.

The funeral service was led by Fr Michael Dunne, chaplain to the Forces and priest of Westminster Cathedral, who spoke of the tributes he had received from all who knew Sapper Azimkar as "an exuberant man with a great sense of fun". Tributes were paid by Lieut Col Lewis and by Patrick's uncle, Aidan Ferguson.

Lieut Col Lewis reminded the audience that on the evening of his death Sapper Azimkar and his comrades had been preparing for a tour of duty in Afghanistan "with quiet determination, resolute firmness and the noble intention of improving the day-to-day lives of the people of Afghanistan. On the evening of March 7th, we suffered a blow of incalculable sadness. . . Two of our own, Sapper Pat Azimkar and his friend and colleague Sapper Mark Quinsey were callously murdered while waiting for their deployment flight. Today is our opportunity to pay tribute to Pat. [He] exemplified the characteristics of a highly motivated young sapper. He was dedicated, ambitious, full of energy, always willing to go the extra mile."

The opening hymn was *I Vow to Thee, My Country, All Earthly Things Above*. The service concluded with *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling* followed by *The Final Commendation* and *The Last Post*.

A firing party from 38 Engineer Regiment then accompanied Sapper Azimkar's coffin to a cemetery in Haringey, North London, for the private interment.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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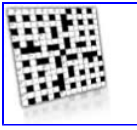
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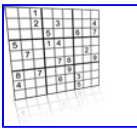
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