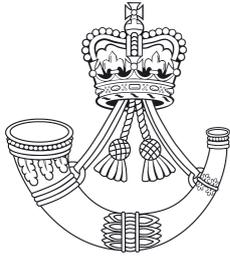


From: General Sir Patrick Sanders KCB CBE DSO ADC Gen, Colonel Commandant



Regimental Headquarters
The Rifles
Peninsula Barracks
Romsey Road
WINCHESTER
Hampshire
SO23 8TS

28 May 2021

Dear Fellow Riflemen,

The recent deaths of Colour Serjeant Matt Pascoe and Lance Corporal Andy Francis have touched us all. The Regiment's sympathies are especially extended to their families, friends and those with which they served so brilliantly. Tragically Matt and Andy are not the first Riflemen we have lost in this manner and despite all that the Army and Regiment have now been doing for some time I fear they will not be the last.

We have been acutely aware that some Riflemen need help: from the Army, NHS and Regiment but most of all from each other. That's why I recorded the 'time to talk' video – to spread the message that all of us, from the most senior to the most junior, have periods of suffering from mental ill-health and that the best possible solution is to talk and ask for help from family and friends.

For many years now The Rifles has been able to assist those in need who have reached out for help. Last year the Army introduced a wide-ranging mental resilience initiative for serving soldiers within the battalions (and wider Army). The NHS has a bespoke veterans treatment plan specifically for veterans. Despite this range of systemic support, we are tragically still losing our fellow Riflemen.

We know the system must play its part. But it can't be everywhere and do everything – we can fill some of those gaps. So I make a personal plea to every Rifleman and their friends. We know that it is those closest to people in need who stand the best chance of recognising when somebody needs help – battle partners as Riflemen were taught in training. A system cannot replace or replicate this. We must swiftly look after each other, call for help as soon as a worry occurs, and boldly dismiss any sense of such care being viewed as an over-reaction. It is a duty that we owe to each other and something that must become deeply embedded in our regimental culture. Should you have the slightest concern about yourself or a comrade, I urge serving Riflemen to alert their chain of command and our veterans to contact the appropriate agencies and/or our Regimental Headquarters so that everyone can be helped or sign-posted to where that help can be found.

I am certain that it is only through our collective care for each other within our regimental family that we will improve a situation that clearly demands all of our attention. Please reflect - who are you worried about? Please check up on them and ask for help if you have the slightest concern. That is the brave and right thing to do and I will be talking again to our Commanding Officers and Council about this very shortly in the hope that we can take our caring culture to the next level it demands. We owe this to our fallen and their families and must all help each other.

I mourn Matt Pascoe and Andy Francis, as I know you do. Two great Riflemen have gone. Rest in Peace.

Patrick Sanders