

**EXCLUSIVE**

**A MOTHER'S AGONY**

**I lost one son to the Taliban.. now I'm terrified I'll lose another**



**FIGHTING TEARS**  
Carla stays strong as Connan follows his brother into the Paras



**PRIDE** Nathan and his mum at passing-in parade



**BROTHERLY LOVE** Family snap of, from left, Blaine, five, Connan, four, and Nathan, 10



**HEARTACHE**  
Nathan's funeral

**MUM Carla Cuthbertson will never forget the day her youngest son vowed to join the Paras. It was the day her eldest son's body was flown home from Afghanistan.**

Private Nathan Cuthbertson was the 100th British soldier killed in the war when he died aged 19 in a suicide bomb attack in Helmand Province two years ago.

This week Connan, 16, kept his promise and joined the Paras just like the beloved brother he lost. The mixed emotions Carla, 38, felt as she saw Connan presented with the coveted maroon beret are revealed here in her own, starkly moving words:

I CRY easily. But on that tough day I didn't cry. At least not in front of Connan. He'd worked incredibly hard to achieve his place in the passing-in ceremony. And I wasn't going to ruin it for him by sobbing.

So I squeezed the tissue in my pocket, squeezed my husband Tom's arm and somehow held the tears back.

It was as if Nathan was saying: "I'm here,

Mam. Be proud." And I was proud. Proud my youngest boy passed the harsh training with A-stars and was achieving his dream.

But I was terrified too. Of him being sent to Afghanistan. Of that knock on the door to tell us another son was dead.

And I was torn to bits by grief. As the young troops marched out in immaculately straight lines, I searched for Connan's face. But I also looked for Nathan's face.

Everything about last Friday brought memories of Nathan rushing back. Pulling up at the gates reminded me of when I dropped him off there on his first day of Army training, the day my little boy left home and returned to me a man.

Seeing Nathan's friends was a comfort, to hear their tales of a great mate they missed. But it made me wonder, would Nathan look like them now? Would he be married or have a baby?

It was Connan's day, though. So even when he put on the maroon beret and my emotions threatened to spill down my face, I stood tall like soldiers are taught.

To most people there, the beret symbolises

being accepted into the Parachute Regiment to train as a junior soldier.

To me, it symbolised the moment officers returned Nathan's beret to us. Tom and I smelled it for half an hour, inhaling every last memory of our firstborn son.

At Connan's passing-in ceremony our family huddled together, supported each other, through our bitter-sweet feelings. We were pleased for Connan. But none of us really wanted him to be there.

We had tried to talk him out of joining the Army. Tom and I sat him down and got quite heavy with him.

**PAIN**

When Nathan died, Connan told his aunt he couldn't face coming home each night because he couldn't stand hearing me cry and couldn't stand feeling unable to take my pain away. I asked if he wanted us to go through that same pain again.

But Connan is a very determined young man. Being a Paratrooper is the only thing he wants to do. I have to remember that if Nathan hadn't died, I would have encouraged him all the way.

Nathan would have been thrilled to see his little brother become a Para.

He'd have told him he was proud. He was such a good big brother to Connan and my middle son, Blaine, 17.

Connan won't like this, but I feel he is

trying to live Nathan's life. He looked up to his big brother so much and is so much like him - fit, athletic and handsome.

Every pay day, Nathan bought me a treat. Connan did exactly the same with his first pay. He gave me new pyjamas, a bottle of wine and chocolates.

I worry all the time Connan's away from home. I miss him all the time. And if he goes to Afghanistan I will be beside myself. But my youngest boy is desperate to go out there. He wants to do his utmost against the enemy that took his brother. Of course he's angry.

Nathan's regiment, 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, went back to Afghanistan last weekend.

His friends told me the first time they were deployed, they were naive teenagers who were really up for it. This time they know what they'll see. They know it's for real. They know the consequences for friends and family. And it's hard.

Connan will be gone again soon to complete more training but he'll be home for Christmas. I love having my sons home. Safe.

During Nathan's baby years it was often just the two of us at home. Tom was then a Paratrooper himself and was away for months on end serving in

Northern Ireland and Kenya. Those years cemented my bond with my boy.

As he grew, we were more like best friends. He thought my job, teaching sexual health to teenagers in schools, was hilarious. His mum talking to kids about condoms was the funniest thing ever.

I give my job my all because the times I'm not busy are the times I sit and cry.

Mums always fight their children's corner because they're driven by so much love. My son is gone but I'm still fighting for him. I want him, and the sacrifice he and his comrades made, to always be remembered.

Nathan died alongside great friends David Murray and Daniel Gamble. Two weeks before they were killed, Nathan and David were

in my kitchen and I asked them to be careful in Afghanistan. Nathan said: "Don't worry, Mam. We would die for each other - like brothers in arms."

When Tom and I decided to set up a permanent memorial for Nathan and other servicemen and women, we knew exactly what to call it.

The Brothers in Arms memorial wall will curve around the cenotaph in Nathan's home city of Sunderland. It will commemorate all the lives lost in the 22 conflicts since the Second World War.

We raised £100,000 to make the memorial idea real thanks to other bereaved military families. Linda Fiske, aunt of Royal Marine Tony Evans who was killed in Afghanistan in 2008. Jan Murray, whose 18-year-old son Michael Tench became one of the youngest victims of the Iraq conflict when he was killed

by a roadside bomb in Iraq in 2007. Brenda Gooch, whose 20-year-old son, Submariner Anthony Huntrod, died after an accident on board a submarine during operations three years ago.

Work on the wall starts next month though we still need cash to maintain it.

People say time heals. I disagree. The longing to see and hold Nathan grows stronger. You learn to live with it. But I still often feel like I'm outside my life looking in, as if I'm living in a story book and it's happening to someone else. Other people lose their sons. Not me.

**SHOCK**

Day-to-day things suddenly throw grief back at me. Even cooking. Nathan loved fajitas and used to beg me to make them as soon as he got home. The family still love them but I hate making them now.

Connan's big day threw up another shock. I saw for the first time the memorial plaque for the men who trained at Harrogate and died. Nathan's name is there but there are far too many names after his. Maybe 30 or 40.

And it was then, when Connan was out of sight, that I disappeared into the ladies' loos and wept.

As told to Julie McCaffrey

**My youngest boy wants to do his utmost against the enemy that took his brother**

**People say time heals. I disagree. The longing to see and hold Nathan grows stronger**



**ANGUISH**  
Tom and Carla Cuthbertson