

Soldier has baby on the frontline: Doctors sent from the UK as Army girl - who didn't even know she was pregnant - gives birth after Taliban raid

- **Royal Artillery gunner who was deployed with the 12th Mechanised Brigade gives birth to baby five weeks premature**
- **Fijian soldier had passed her pre-deployment training, including an eight-mile march and five-mile run, without realising she was pregnant**
- **British Army handbook editor says top brass will need to 'start thinking very, very carefully' about how female soldiers are tested before deployment**

By Ian Drury and David Williams

A British soldier who did not know she was pregnant has given birth on the frontline. The woman had a son in Camp Bastion on Tuesday – just days after the Taliban launched a deadly attack on the UK's main base in Helmand. The baby was born five weeks premature. Last night both mother and child were said to be doing well. A paediatric team from the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford will travel to Afghanistan in the next few days to provide care for the soldier and her son on their RAF flight home.



Camp Bastion, Afghanistan: A Fijian woman soldier stationed at the British base in Helmand gave birth on Tuesday. The super fit squaddie did not even realise she was pregnant



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Unexpected task: The soldier, who has not been named, was taken to Camp Bastion's £10million field hospital where Army medics delivered her baby

The birth has stunned military chiefs and led to calls for extra medical checks on women who are sent to the warzone.

Almost 200 troops have discovered they were pregnant at war since 2003 – forcing commanders to send them straight back to Britain. But this is the first time a UK soldier has given birth to a baby in Afghanistan.

The soldier, a gunner in the Royal Artillery who helped provide covering fire for troops fighting insurgents, was unaware that she was carrying a child. She had been deployed with the 12th Mechanised Brigade since March, but two days ago complained of severe stomach pains. To her astonishment, medics informed her that she was about to give birth. She was in the 34th week of her pregnancy, meaning she conceived before flying to Afghanistan for her six-month tour of duty.



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This screengrab of a video released by a Taliban media unit purports to show last weekend's raid on Bastion: The pregnant soldier, a gunner in the Royal Artillery, was part of the forces mobilised to defend the base. She was taken to Camp Bastion's £10million field hospital where doctors – who are more used to carrying out amputations and treating bullet wounds – delivered her son. Despite its location, the hospital is one of the best equipped in the world and has portable X-ray machines, an operating theatre, CAT scanner and an intensive care unit capable of treating up to 20 seriously-ill patients. A military source said: 'This has left us completely gobsmacked. You prepare yourself for dealing with war

wounded at Bastion – not a mother giving birth to a baby. It is the talk of the camp. 'This is a very unusual case. The mother deployed not realising she was pregnant and had no idea she was pregnant until she gave birth. She has not done anything wrong.' Lieutenant Colonel Andrea Lewis, commanding officer of the field hospital, said: 'This is a unique occurrence, but my team is well-rehearsed in the unexpected and they adapted brilliantly to this situation. 'I am pleased to report the mother and baby are doing well and we are all delighted at the outcome.'



Emergency treatment: Bastion's medics are more used to treating bullet and blast wounds than delivering infants. The Fijian soldier had passed her tough pre-deployment training, which included a gruelling eight-mile march and five-mile run, without an inkling that she was pregnant. A senior Army insider said: 'It is bizarre that she didn't feel some side effects of the pregnancy. She is obviously pretty fit and strong. The strains and demands on soldiers working on the frontline make it surprising she didn't realise.'

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Senior Army insider

'But the conditions of deployment, the different diet, the heat of the Afghan summer, the different hours of working, mean that many soldiers feel a little odd and put it down to the change of environment. 'The baby's successful delivery is a wonderful testament to the outstanding job the medics do here. It shows how they can use their extraordinary skills to turn their hands from saving lives to delivering babies.'

'A lot of the medics are reservists and work in hospitals back in the UK so the concept of someone giving birth is not completely alien to them. But they do not have paediatric equipment here so they had to make do as best they could.'



At war: Prince Harry is currently deployed at Bastion as a gunner co-pilot in an Apache helicopter squadron

BOMB VICTIM'S FINAL MESSAGE



A woman killed by a suicide bomber in Kabul left a final message on Twitter weeks before she died, reading: 'I am back in Afghanistan and wonder what lies before me this time.'

Jeni Ayris, *pictured right*, of Edinburgh, died alongside 11 fellow aviation workers when a female insurgent rammed a car laden with explosives into their minibus as they drove to the airport on Tuesday.

She had been due to leave the country this weekend to see friends and her sister Patricia.

Islamist body Hezb-e-Islami claimed responsibility for the attack. It said the bombing was a response to a US film lampooning the Prophet Muhammad, which has sparked lethal riots across the globe.

South African-born Miss Ayris, 46, had spent 17 years in the Scottish capital.

She had been in Afghanistan to organise flights for charities and non-governmental organisations.

A friend, Richard Kellett, said: 'She loved her job. She would go out there for three months at a time . . . when she came home on leave she always looked forward to going back.'

A statement from Miss Ayris's family described her as 'a warm, kind and generous person with an everyday objective of helping everyone she met'.

Major Charles Heyman, who edits the British Army handbook, said the incident was 'astonishing'. He said: 'Commanders need to start thinking very, very carefully about what sort of medical examinations female soldiers have before they deploy on operations.

'A simple urine test would indicate if someone was pregnant. The Army now needs to tighten up its procedures.' Since 2003 at least 70 British servicewomen have been sent home from Afghanistan after discovering they were expecting. And at least 102 female soldiers were evacuated from Iraq after it was found they were pregnant. Last year the Mail told how Private Kayla Donnelly, then 21, from Penrith, Cumbria, served in Helmand unaware that she was seven months' pregnant. She had conceived before going to Afghanistan as a machine-gunner and thought her weight gain was due to high-calorie Army rations. It was only when she collapsed in Tenerife after her tour of duty that she realised she was pregnant.

Around 500 British women are currently on duty in Afghanistan. They can serve in any unit except those whose primary role is to 'close with and kill' – engage in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy. Eight women have died in Iraq and Afghanistan, two per cent of the total fatalities. They include Corporal Sarah Bryant, 26, from Carlisle, serving with the Army Intelligence Corps, who was killed in an explosion in Afghanistan in 2008, and Second Lieutenant Joanna Dyer, 24, from Yeovil, a friend of Prince William and also of the Army Intelligence Corps, who was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq in 2007.