

# God will guide our loved ones at war

**LIFE is an emotional rollercoaster for anyone with a family member or friend deployed to a war zone.**

But for Penny and John Pink, who were told their son Peter wasn't going to live beyond eight months old, it's a blessing to see him fulfilling his Christian duty serving in Afghanistan.

Although the couple, from St Michael's Church in Chalton, were worried when he wanted to join the Royal Air Force, they knew their faith would keep them positive for his sake.

"I always felt that if a war was right then as Christians you have a duty to fight," said Penny. "No parent ever wants their son to go to war. But Peter said to us that if anything ever happened then it was his choice. We felt it was his duty and if it was something he really wanted to do then we had to stand by him for his sake."

The 32-year-old corporal was posted to Afghanistan in November 2009 for a six-month tour of duty. The real worry for his family started when Operation Moshtarak, a test of the coalition of forces to take down the Taliban,



**Peter Pink in Afghanistan and (right) hugging his mum Penny**

began in February 2010. The hope was that it would help end the insurgency and test whether the Afghan forces could make their country peaceful and safe.

Peter, who is now back at an RAF base in Lincolnshire, said: "Life is so busy when you're out there – you're either working, sleeping or eating and you get very tired. You've got a job to do and you keep your head down and get on with it."

"Every time we lost one of our men – and we lost 64 during my six-month deployment – a vigil

was held the night before repatriation to the UK. Everyone who was available would take part and it would hit home, but you can't afford to dwell on it. You have to stay focused and get on with what you have to do. Having a faith helps because you know you can talk to God anytime, in any place. You put yourself and the people at home in his hands."

The family are used to asking God to keep Peter safe. When he was born he was diagnosed with tumours on his liver, and suffered heart failure as a result. Doctors said he wouldn't live beyond eight months old. He required major surgery at Kings College Hospital in London aged only five months. He was only the fourth child in the country to have the operation – and two of the others didn't survive. The operation tied off the blood supply to the tumours.

But the experience reignited his parents' faith. Penny began reading her Bible again and was frequently visited by Canon Grant Ockwell, who was then vicar at Holy Trinity, Blendworth. She said: "Although it was such a horrible situation, both my husband and I came back to church because of Peter's suffering. With three chil-

## my faith

Penny and John Pink discovered early in their son's life how important it was to pray for his safety. When he was posted to Afghanistan with the RAF, they prayed similar prayers

dren, life had unfortunately for a time got in the way of us going to church.

"After the operation Peter received treatment at St Mary's Hospital in Portsmouth. I used to spend time sitting in the chapel by a picture of Mary holding the baby Jesus. I thought: she knows what I'm going through as a mother to see her child suffering.

"The hospital chaplain, Canon Peter Keightley, said he felt our Peter had been saved for something special, although he didn't know what it would be. Some people called him the miracle baby."

She believes his survival has given hope to others who need the surgery and led him to see through his determination to join the RAF.

The moment when Peter, then 23, announced he was joining the RAF was one of the hardest for Penny and John. But he told them he was going in with his eyes open and if anything was to happen they should remember that.

"My heart sank," said Penny. "But John took it more in his stride because he had been in the forces and been in Aden during the trouble there in the 1960s. Like most parents in this situation we did our best to hide our feelings."

But, knowing he was risking his life, Penny turned to God to keep him safe. "We have always found prayer helpful, both ours and those of other people praying for

us," she said. "It was as if it provided a sling of support beneath us. That 'peace of mind which passes all understanding' often encompassed us."

"Initially I had a problem with praying because I knew Afghanistan and its people had to be remembered as a whole. It was so hard. How was I to include the Taliban in this? I realised that I could pray for them to see that love is the way forward – not the killing and intimidation of local people who often live in fear."

With limited contact with Peter, Penny and John became more anxious and reliant on the media. BBC News 24 became their most regularly viewed TV channel so they could stay in touch.

"Bad news of the loss of one of our troops would bring a flash of fear, followed by relief, followed rapidly by guilt for feeling that relief," she said. "Our hearts did, and still do, go out to the bereaved families and we know that for each loss, several service people would have been injured. They go un-named more often than not, but they too give so much."

Penny often glances at a photo of Peter hugging her. It reminds her of when Peter, aged 15,

went to a confirmation camp in Finland with other teenagers and was taught by the leaders Janet Laws, Bob White and David Isaac from our diocese not to be ashamed of giving big bearhugs.

"It is much easier as a Christian knowing that other people are praying for you and to confide in God. It's not an easy ride, but having a faith makes it so much easier."



**Leighton Davies serving in Afghanistan**

## Praying for his safety

FOR Julie Davies, whose husband is serving out in Afghanistan, the support of the church has been a godsend.

Her husband Leighton is a Staff Sergeant in 47 Regiment of the Royal Artillery and Julie appreciates the support and prayers of worshippers at Holy Trinity Church, Blendworth.

They frequently ask how Leighton is while he is on duty and help to care for Julie and their children Cerys, aged 7, and Leila, 2.

"When I'm at church I will

have an extra prayer for him, and me and the girls pray before their bedtime, asking for their dad to be kept safe," said Julie. "I have that extra sense of community at the church with their support, as well as from the family network group – the families of those in that regiment – when we meet up."

"If Leighton is not at church because he is working, people are always interested in us all and they are very supportive to us."

