



THE STAR

Issue 1, May 2013

To our family and friends,

Well we've finally all made it into the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO). It's now FCU IX's responsibility to maintain the largest and most complex communications network the Australian Defence Force has ever had in a deployed environment. A daunting task but one in which we will succeed. I must congratulate all the members of FCU VIII who can be rightly proud of their efforts in preparing us for that success. Your handover to us was outstanding and the 'skeletons in the cupboard' have only been very small ones! We all wish you the very best and hope you enjoy your time back with family and friends.

As I said at our Farewell Parade, the thing I'm most excited about with this deployment is the truly Joint nature of the FCU. We have members from all three Services and they cover a wide range of experience, trade specialisation and life experience (officer speak meaning some of us are a little older than others). On completion of our ten-week force concentration in Darwin I was convinced I'm leading a great crew who will be a credit to themselves, the unit and their respective Service.

I've tried to make 'fun' compulsory but the Unit Warrant Officer, Graham Schilling, has advised me that it is not a lawful order (Warrant Officer speak for 'You can't do that, sir'). Nevertheless, I believe that if you want to have a good time, you will. Also, I've encouraged everyone to treat this deployment as an opportunity to learn. I hope people will make the effort to learn about each other; to share experiences, both good and bad; and to return home knowing a little more about the other Services than they do now. Over the coming months I'm sure the pages of our newsletter will give an indication of how well my hopes are being realised. Each newsletter we'll try and give our family and friends an insight into the 'fun' life in the MEAO with a truly Joint unit. This issue focuses primarily on personal reflections of Force Preparation and the Handover/Takeover activities of past weeks.

I'd like to finish my first CO's Column by introducing you to the FCU IX logo.



We have a nine-point star, a subtle link to our rotation number. The red, light blue and dark blue colours of the star represent the principle colours of each of the three Services. The IX in the centre of the star is a much more obvious link to our rotation number. The Southern Cross is a symbol of the country we serve and finally the lightning flash, which is a traditional symbol of the communications community.

I believe this logo is an excellent representation of what FCU IX is all about – the ninth Joint communications unit serving Australia in the MEAO. Finally, I must pass on my personal thanks to WO1 Greg Elliot who was instrumental in developing the artwork for our logo. Well done, Greg.

Until next time.

Regards,

Wing Commander Gordon Pert
Commanding Officer FCU-9

AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

OFFICER COMMANDING

Welcome to the first edition of the FCU-9 newsletter. Jeremy Mikus writing, I am fortunate to be the Officer Commanding of the Afghanistan Signals Squadron during this deployment. I will take the opportunity on each release of the newsletter to give an update on how the Squadron is progressing, and highlight a few things that I think should be recognised in this forum.



I would like to recognise the hard work that the Squadron has put in to get up to speed with training and skills in preparation for this deployment. Because I have been deployed since October 2012 on the last FCU, I was unable to take part in the pre-deployment training, and so the organisation fell to the rest of the Squadron Headquarters. Even after a short time deployed it is very clear to me that all of the Soldiers, the Sailors and Airmen in the Squadron have been well prepared for their employment over here. Morale is good, and the units and personnel that we support have already commented favourably on the support that has been provided to them.

Straight off the bat our people in Kabul, Kandahar and Tarin Kowt have had to catch the ball and run with it. I am sure that it is news to no one reading this, that Australia is looking to withdraw a great majority of personnel and equipment from Afghanistan, and this task has already provided a great deal of work. As a running theme throughout this deployment, there are a number of major milestones that we will all have to achieve before returning home. We are tracking well, with momentum provided by the outgoing FCU, but the majority of the work lies ahead of us.

There is a wide range of employment throughout the Squadron, differing not only in deployed location, but also with trade and specific tasks. The articles provided by the personnel of Afghanistan Signals Squadron will give an insight into the breadth of jobs that we have to do. Especially for this deployment, with all of the changes that will be taking place, it will become apparent that there will be very few idle moments for our personnel on this deployment.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the HQ team for Afghanistan Signals Sqn. We are:

WO2 Phil Prosser: As the Squadron Sergeant Major (SSM) he is the senior soldier in the Squadron, and the enforcer of all things discipline. The SSM is Armoured Corps, and rides Harleys. ‘Nuff said.

CAPT Phil Ellsmore: Played OC before I was on the scene, did a great job to get the Squadron over the line comfortably before deployment. His roles include making sure that



everyone in the Squadron knows what it is that they are meant to be doing. Think – cat herder.

WO2 Brandt Grollmus: As the Communications Systems Manager he does things with radio waves and the electromagnetic spectrum that makes everyone else go cross-eyed. He also keeps a keen eye on where everyone in the Squadron is at any given moment, and is notionally responsible for keeping the other Managers under control.

FSGT Danny Waldron: Somehow an Air Force member has infiltrated the headquarters, but we are glad it is him. As the Technical Systems Manager he is responsible for the links between bases within Afghanistan, and also to strategic locations. Danny can be counted on to miss the dart board completely at any given moment.

SGT Mark McGavin: No surprises on the nickname, Shooter is an FCU veteran who, as the Information Systems Manager, is responsible for making sure that all the ones and zeroes line up as they should in all of our computer systems. Totally resisting the urge to explain why it is difficult to remember ones own rank from time to time, I will instead focus on Shooters amazing collection of random and occasionally interesting general knowledge.

WO2 Pete Sharman: Pete has the unenviable task of tracking and monitoring all stores and equipment movements as we prepare to move... everything. He is the Squadron Quarter Master Sergeant, and will be a very busy man throughout the deployment.

CPL Justin Hanney: As the Squadron Quartermaster and Pete's right hand man, Justin will assist in the mammoth task of keeping track of everything.

PTE Courtney Bratton. Easily the most consistently happy person on the planet, Courtney is responsible for the overall administration of the Squadron, particularly ensuring that all personnel are well represented and informed. From what I have seen so far on this tour, the Squadron is in good hands.

WO2 Martin Arundel. Martin has been cast away from the rest of the HQ to represent the Squadron in Kandahar as a part of Regional Command – South. Whilst living it up on the Boardwalk and choosing between KFC, Pizza Hut and TGIF's for dinner, Martin has a busy time ahead of him liaising with our coalition partners on our behalf.

In closing, I am thoroughly looking forward to the challenges and tasks that are ahead of us, and as a part of the capable team that is the Afghanistan Signals Squadron, offering the highest standard of capability and support throughout our mission. There is no way that any of us could do it without the love and support of our family and friends back at home, and so in parting I recognise all of those at home who are so important to everyone here.

Jeremy Mikus
Officer Commanding
Afghanistan Signals Squadron
FCU-9



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

OPERATIONS OFFICER

FORCE PREP

Force Communications Unit IX (FCU-9) came together on the 11 February 13 on a hot, humid, Darwin day. From the four corners of Australia, soldiers, sailors, airmen and women congregated at Robertson Barracks.

A unit of mixed backgrounds, the two months spent training together in Darwin built bonds that cannot be underestimated. Suffering through the early morning physical training whilst being bucketed-on by Darwin's wet season; the random power outages caused by severe thunderstorms bringing a complete stop to training; the close living environment in Tin City; and worse of all, the distance from our family and loved ones. All of this, whilst knowing that we hadn't even reached day one of our deployment.

For many, this was not their first deployment. Veterans of multiple tours, they had seen it all before. They naturally took on the mentoring role for the young and eager.

What complicated things were the different service cultures. Army, Navy and Air Force all asked to do a similar job. This ability to directly compare the services had the potential to cause friction, but it never eventuated. Of course, there were differences. Army had the distinctive mission focus: "Whatever it takes to get the job done" and "Above all, the mission or task takes priority". Meanwhile, Air Force understood the importance of the 'one percenters' and ticking off all your governance and policy requirements before you even attempt the job. Finally Navy, growing beards and sharing their filthy humour, lightened the mood in times of stress or boredom. In many ways, each of the services strengths covered the others weaknesses.



The Tri-Service represented

As the weeks rolled by and the weather improved, so did the team that was FCU-9. The underdogs at the start turned into a functioning unit with the ability to provide strategic communications in warlike conditions. As we moved into the final Certification Exercise to validate our positions for the upcoming rotation we were confident in our abilities. However, if we thought it was going to be a walk in the park, we were wrong. The mentality of our assessors was that whatever could go wrong, will go wrong.... and all at once. By the end of the exercise we had achieved the aim but the unit was tired and needed a rest. The guys and girls had a week off with family to look forward to, but it was hard to relax with the knowledge that the real job had yet to begin.



Farewell Parade Force Communications Unit IX

CAPT Phil Ellsmore



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

SQUADRON SERGEANT MAJOR

By way of introduction, I am WO2 Phill Prosser, the SSM of Afghanistan Signal Squadron (AFG SIG SQN). This is my 4th deployment and the 3rd here in Afghanistan. Being a Cavalryman, communications to me is fairly simple, radios within my vehicle talking to other vehicles over small distances. The communications the guys are providing here are far more sophisticated than that: computers, satellite dishes and a whole lot of other stuff I am slowly learning about.

Well, it's been a long time but we are finally here. After nearly 3 months of Force Preparation training, many individual courses, the CO's and Divisional Certification Exercise (CERTEX), a very short period of leave and then a very long series of plane flights, we finally made it.

For some of us, we have already spent a considerable time away from home. About 45% of the SQN is not Darwin-based, so for them the Force Preparation was a very long time. Certainly all the SQN who had the opportunity to take leave prior to departure enjoyed it.

The flight over was long, but not as long as the next days training. After stepping off the plane at 0 dark hundred we immediately started with 12 hours of PowerPoint presentations. I honestly could not tell you what was covered that day. Following that, we had three more days of training, some a rehash of what we had done in the past, and some extremely good.

From there we flew into our respective areas and commenced the handover/takeovers with our incumbents. The handovers gave us all an excellent opportunity to learn the job we will be doing for the next 6 months. It also gave us an insight into some of the issues we may have in the future.

For those of us staying here in Tarin Kowt, the job will be extremely varied and interesting. Not only will it be the maintenance of the existing systems, but the guys will be heavily involved in the re-establishment of new areas as the location slowly closes down. Certainly the time we are here, we will be extremely busy and that will help make the time fly.

Now that we are here, we need to maintain the excellent job that FCU-8 did and indeed make our mark on those we provide the services for.



THE ROAD TO AMAB

Tin City, Robertson Barracks in the far northern city of Darwin became home for a large group of unsuspecting ADF members thrown together for the first time. All of whom were expected to unite as one and eventually deploy as representatives of the ADF as TG633.14, FCU-9. Daunting for many, familiar to a few, we had now embarked on a training schedule to prepare some for life in AMAB and for others, beyond. Darwin now seemed like an obvious choice.....

Physical Training at 0730 every morning for the first 4 – 5 weeks was compulsory – compulsory torture for some and a method for showing sadistic tendencies for others. The sessions were beneficial; we became fitter, healthier and yes, appreciative of the time of day at which it was conducted. Any later and there would have been nothing left of us except the soaking wet clothing we had been standing in. The humidity of Darwin felt like a sauna, even at that time of the day. We would hang our clothes out to dry over the rails, put our shoes in the sun and if lucky, would come back ‘home’ to find them dry (and stiff). If however, you were unlucky and it had showered (torrential downpour by southern standards) your clothing and shoes were saturated and you would rush them to the first available drier (assuming it worked) in an attempt to beat everyone else, and then be prepared to go through it all again the next day (Groundhog Day).

Force Preparation Training (FPT) was the ‘necessary evil’ required to group this bunch of misfits together and form us into the Unit TG633.14 FCU-9. Darwin, if nothing else, would help us to become acclimatised to what was waiting for us in AMAB.

Nine weeks passed by, in hindsight, quite rapidly. At the time however it seemed slow and painful with accompanying complaints of its duration, especially considering that shortly afterwards deployment would occur. To the mathematicians amongst us this was growing into an 8 – 9 month deployment before we would be together with families again.

However, aside from the food (not quite like Mother makes) FPT was bearable, fun when it could be, hard work when it had to be and yes, tedious at times - yet many of us look back now at that time in Tin City with a kind of fondness which seems to be contradictory to the experiences ‘at the time’.

The final testing stage came upon us and all members of the newly formed FCU-9 were anxious. The CO had expectations that were ‘fair’ to say the least, and he did his utmost to deflect any pressure that he himself was probably feeling. “Don’t worry – just do your best, and more importantly *have fun*”, was the instruction from our CO. Thankfully, the ‘*have fun*’ label wasn’t taken too literally by those among us who would have revelled in the opportunity to do just that. More importantly, it was that period in our FPT at Darwin that you could see how everyone would gel in the deployed environment. It was the time when everyone was a mate to all and did his or her best not to let the CO and the rest of the ‘mates’ down. It was the time where it became obvious that this bunch of misfits were a team, prepared to watch out for each other, cover for each other without a worry or a care about missing lunch – the job had to be done.



Divisional CERTEX completed – let’s all breathe. The CO congratulates all on a job well done and all bar the shouting, FPT is over. NOT YET – wait up, we have a parade. SSM AFG SIG SQN rubs his hands together in anticipation and it’s time for rehearsals. Twice, yes *twice* – FCU-9 as a combined Unit rehearsed for the parade. Not too shabby for a bunch of misfits put together nine weeks before hand. It is safe to say that even though there was no big brass band, banner waving crowds or any of that type of razzmatazz, the pride was such that once the drum beat started we marched onto that parade proud of ourselves and each other. It is not often when members are in combat boots on bitumen that you can hear in excess of 100 people coming to attention and stand at ease as one.

Indicative of what FCU-9 has become – I think.

LAC Colin Foard
GSS Clerk



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

TARIN KOWT

THE FOG OF MORE

“Pre-deployment folders!” was the call from the Chief Clerk. Closely followed by some stern promises of what would happen to us if we were to lose, destroy, misplace or incorrectly fill-in any part of said folder. It appeared that we were the chosen ones and force concentration for FCU-9 had begun.

It was all passports and dog-tags in the early days with a few interviews thrown in for good measure. Soldiers, sailors and airmen were sent across the country gaining skills pertinent to employment in the Middle East. We filled in forms, filled spread sheets, filled folders and filled the roll book. We rediscovered Power Point Presentations and then rediscovered them some more (and some more). Our RAAF member rediscovered weapon handling and together we began to sharpen our skills. This was the beginning of being in the Army for our lonely RAAF member and he soon lost his right to wear his baseball cap and blue PT shorts. It was evident that Tri-Service had just become Tri-Army.

We pushed our way through the paperwork and training, pausing only to be issued field equipment. Extreme cold weather gear? For the desert? In summer? These were questions that could only be answered with the realisation that this deployment could last until the Afghan winter sets in. Sub-zero temperatures and midnight gun pickets – I think I will grab another set of thermals, thanks. TK TP looked good to go, well, good to go to the certification exercise anyway. So that’s what we did. We worked hard, played our part in the scenarios and passed the certification serials. We were officially certified and TK TP as part of FCU-9 was one step closer to deploying.

The CO decreed that we take some time off with our loved ones before deploying and we all did our bit to make it happen. For one member this time was particularly special as he had recently welcomed his daughter into the world. TK TP welcomed Mikayla Ward into their extended family. Flowers, congratulations and a well-deserved break was just what the doctor ordered but leave for all just seemed to go that little bit too quick.

Today’s the day. Bags were already packed and anything forgotten was staying that way as hugs and tears were to take precedence over everything else. The older kids knew the drill and the younger ones didn’t understand that you would be absent for their birthdays. Realisation was to be a pain for another time. The wait at the airport seemed endless, but the flight gave ‘endless’ new meaning. If not for a storm and a mid-air reminder of the evacuation procedure (not comforting) it would have been quite a boring flight. We all arrived in Dubai and it was off to induction training and the re-re-re-discovery of Power Point presentations.

For four days we were inducted and further prepared for life in the Middle East. The training was based on real experiences and actual events. We were as ready to go as we ever would be. We were briefed on baggage and flights and the following day we were loaded into the C-130 Hercules and began the journey into Tarin Kowt.



Arriving in TK we were greeted by the previous FCU rotation. They were happy to be one step closer to heading home and we were ready to get on with the job. The hand over began and the complexities of the task that lay ahead were immediately realised. Circuits had changed, equipment was moved and planned timeframes for moving people had reduced. We had hit the ground running. Since taking over, TK TP has moved force elements into new office spaces, responded to faults, conducted maintenance and got on with the 24/7 provision of CIS services. It has now been three weeks since taking over and it feels like a months worth of work has been completed. We have been told the tempo is to increase and on top of that more people will leave and more will turn up.

If there is one thing in common between us and those we left home it is the mutual understanding that there's another week to come and many more after that. It will be a hard slog for us all and I am sure we are thinking of you as much as you are of us.



Our thoughts go to all the families (especially the brand new ones).

SGT Dave Brennan

From the Editor... **Acronyms for Dummies Civvies**



AFG SIG SQN- Afghanistan Signal Squadron: HQ in Tarin Kowt with nodes in Tarin Kowt, Kabul, Kandahar Airfield

AMAB – Al Minhad Air Base

A SQN- Alpha Squadron: HQ in Tarin Kowt

CERTEX- Certification Exercise completed in Darwin to confirm FCU-9 was ready to go!

FCU-9- Force Communications Unit, No. 9

GSS – Gulf States Squadron: HQ in AMAB with nodes in AMAB, Qatar, Bahrain

IS- Information Systems

MEAO- Middle East Area of Operations

Node- another name for troop or section

HOTO- Handover/ takeover



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD

I am FLGOFF Langbridge, based at 1 Combat Communications Squadron (1CCS) at RAAF Richmond. I am in charge of the communications node based at Kandahar Airfield, known as KAF Flight.

For 1CCS members, FCU-9 began on the 12th of February when we left Sydney for Darwin. This was my first time in Darwin during the wet season. It was very humid, the days punctuated by short heavy showers, making PT and just getting around the base pretty sweaty. Being away from home was an extra challenge, given the time we were about to spend overseas but the locals at 1 Combat Signals Regiment made us feel very welcome.

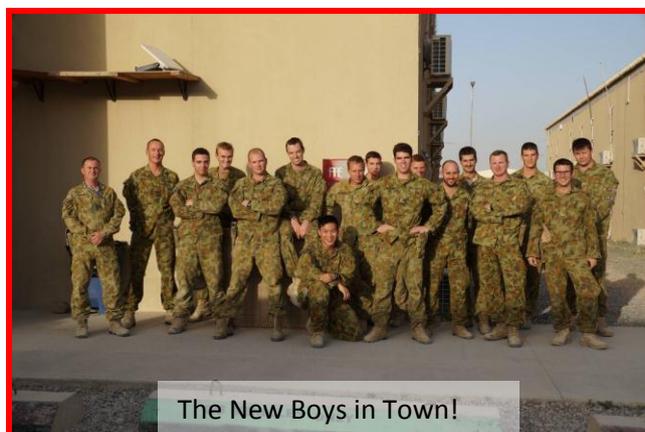


Outgoing Node Commander FLGOFF Sibi Ravindran hands over to FLGOFF Samuel Langbridge

The training we conducted was great and covered topics that aren't usually taught in the RAAF. This included Care of the Battle Casualty (CBC) and Explosives Hazards Awareness Training (EHAT). During EHAT we were taken through a variety of ordnance produced around the world as well as the structure and employment of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's). The 9 weeks training in Darwin was capped off with a parade.

After a week of leave I was ready to depart. We flew from Sydney to Darwin and then to Dubai. We landed and began out reception straight away. Looking back now it is a complete blur, a combination of jet lag and early starts making the days fly by. Our passports were stamped not long after we left the plane and before we knew it, we were at The Sands (a recreational room on the base in Dubai) getting briefed for our next flights.

With all our training in Dubai finished, my Information Systems detachment commander, SIG Megyeri (Chris), and I were on a flight to KAF the next day. The rest of my team would follow over the next week. We stopped off in Kabul and landed in KAF, a dusty and strange place. One of the most notable sights when driving from the aircraft to Camp Baker (the Australian compound on KAF) was the University of Maryland, advertising opportunities to study.



The New Boys in Town!

The next week was spent getting orientated and up to speed on my job and responsibilities. By the following Sunday everyone had arrived; 16 of us in total. On 06 May the FCU-8 flag was lowered and the FCU-9 flag was raised. With the whole team here, everyone was keen and eager to start business.



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

KANDAHAR AIR FIELD

FORCE CONCENTRATION/RSO&I

Hello there. My name is Ryan Bowen. I'm part of the KAF Tech Det along with Costa, Lucca, and Winks. I've been given the job to write a brief article on our time in FCU-9 so far, so I hope you all enjoy. And yes, that's a real mullet.

Bowen's article is a better read than '50 Shades of Grey', a must read.

- Random author



Everyone was eager to meet the people they'd be spending the best part of a year working and living with. Eventually, a bus load of RAAFies arrived and things could get underway. A few brief introductions and guidelines for a happy hierarchy and FCU-9 was officially formed.

It didn't take long to get to know the new troops, from the men I'd be working with through to SGT Kline, whose PT sessions could make you hobble for a week.

Force Concentration went by relatively quickly. CERTEX, courses, and everyone's favourite, admin, took up the majority of our time. We received our black personal administration folders during the first week, which were deceivingly time consuming. They required more work than a second-hand Ford and more photos than a Jennifer Hawkins wardrobe malfunction. Eventually everyone had them squared away, and before we knew it, it was time for the Farewell Parade. The edges of the parade ground were crowded with family and friends of those about to deploy. Even the highly respected NT News came along. The Parade went well and gave the families a chance to get to know each other for extra support throughout the year.

A week or two of leave flew past and the day of departure came. Last minute scrambling through the bags to confirm what's in there and we were off to the airport. After spending the final moments on Aussie soil with family and friends, we crammed on the plane for a quick 12 hour flight.

We landed in Al Minhad Air Base (AMAB) and hit the ground running..... all the way to the lecture room, where we sat through hours of PowerPoint presentations. The four days of RSO&I were some of our most exhausting thus far, though at the same time the training was second to none. With an endless supply of muffins in the room, most members were happy. But once again everyone was flying out to their respective locations to commence their handover/takeovers. That's all the stories I have for now, so until next time, thanks to all the family and friends for their continuing support, and stay safe!



FCU-9 HEADQUARTERS

AL MINHAD AIR BASE, UAE

GREETINGS FROM THE WATCHIES!

Having finally arrived in the UAE, we have completed our reception training and some of us have moved onto our more permanent locations. Ancient lands where people still live simple lives: Tarin Kowt, Kandahar, Kabul, Qatar, UAE (where modern world influences have spilled into old cultures), and even the Kingdom of Bahrain. We have taken over from the previous unit and embarked on a quest to keep our communications alive and open so we can assist in achieving our aims.

So, here I am, Leo 'Dutchy' Vredembregt. I'm a sailor, a Chief Petty Officer and as the other two fondly call me, the Uber Watch-Keeper, referring to my long history of pulling a watch or two either in a communications station or at sea in a ship's COMMCEN.



The three 'D's': Dutchy, Dowdy and Dovey

Our Senior Watch-Keeper is LT Nathan Dove, or 'Dovey' as we refer to him. He has grasped the idea of watch-keeping and trying to make his body stay awake at 0300 when your body does not want to cooperate. You'll find him at the gym trying to smash out his weights routine, hanging in his room listening to tunes or skyping with his loved one.

Young FLGOFF Michael Dowd ('Dowdy') is the other member who completes our trio. When he is not changing the screen saver with pictures of his sheep back home, he is doing the typical young engineer thing, tinkering with a remote control helicopter left by the previous mob. He has an uncanny knowledge of the Navy but it is not surprising with his girlfriend serving in *HMAS Parramatta* (funnily enough one of my old ships).

Together, we form the 24/7 contact for the Commanding Officer (CO) on all communication matters affecting us in the region, so the CO can report to Headquarters as necessary. As I hope you can imagine, it is an important job to coordinate the 'right-here, right-now' situations. We need to know what is going on with our networks or satellite trunks at all times. Should we have a failure in the system we will manage and coordinate with our counterparts back in Australia to resolve the issue and bring the system back online.

With only a handful of sailors attached to FCU-9, we are definitely the minority but each of us has an important role in the team. It has presented a few challenges for us but none that could not be worked out and overcome quickly. I myself have had quite a bit of experience working with the other two services back in Australia. So now I'm going to rely on that experience to get me through the next six months. Watch-keeping in the Communications Management Group has a definite Tri-Service flavour.



ALPHA SQUADRON

THEATRE LINE DETACHMENT - TARIN KOWT

THE BOYS, THE BEGINNING AND THE BURNING

Once upon a time in a land far, far away (aka Darwin), an eclectic yet animated mix of four RAAF and four Army guys answered the call to mount the greatest capability for FCU-9, more formally known as Theatre Line Detachment-9 (TLD-9). The team is made up of: CPL Xavier “Nags” Nagle, SIG Justin “Hagla” Hague, SIG Shane “Shanka” King, from 1 CSR; LAC Carl “Carly” Taylor and LAC Tim “Fish” Kasapis from RAAF Darwin; LT Ryan “Pitty” Pitt and SGT Scott “Scotty” Duncan from RAAF Amberley; and a lone soul from RAAF Richmond-LAC Kyle “Fancy Hair” Fraser.

Everyone came together to begin our Force Preparation Training, and found out that we quickly became “Team Atlantis” – the lost team of FCU-9; we had several temp bosses, as our actual boss was already in country. After nine sweaty weeks in Darwin, consisting of PT, sweating, formal lectures, sweating, administration and more sweating, we finally finished. To their credit, the guys arranged their own rigger training and a formal fibre course with little guidance from HQ. Things were coming along quite well for the TLD-9 team.

On the 23rd of April 2013, we all said our goodbyes to our loved ones and boarded the plane to Al Minhad Air Base (AMAB). After flying all night, we landed at 0350h the next day, and were assaulted by four long and cruel days of PowerPoint presentations and continuation training of the skills we had learnt in Darwin.

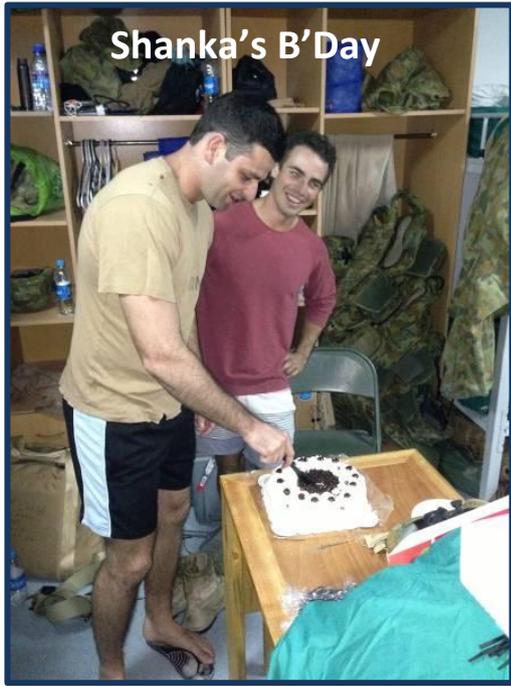
After the training, it was time to board our plane to head to Tarin Kowt (TK), Afghanistan. As fate would have it, the team would be broken up into two for the trip north to TK. When we landed, the guys started settling in by setting up their personal ‘bat cave’ sleeping area, complete with TV’s, tables and a hell of a lot of cables.

Our first few days in TK were focussed around a “Hand Over, Take Over” (HOTO) from the current TLD. The HOTO is important as it gives a background on how the current team does business, and gives a run through for the current and future tasks. All goes well for the first few days, albeit the information overload can be likened to drinking from a fire hose! However, on the final day of HOTO, when everything has been finalised, and our predecessors were packing their bags ready to go home, a terrible, most heinous thing happened. Part of our beloved work area compound, complete with couches, fridge and a dart board.....BURNT DOWN, losing two vital shipping connex’s worth of stores. Personally, I blame our predecessors playing a practical joke (sorry TLD-8). As fate would have it, the dart board and couches were saved.

Overall, it has been a very interesting start to our deployment. I am sure that the team will do an excellent job, and will have plenty of stories along the way...without burning anything else down.

LT Ryan Pitt





“Rip it up... burn it down...

or bring it home...”



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

TARIN KOWT

THE JOURNEY SO FAR...

First stop was the UAE for our final training before we could be signed off as fit, fighting, warriors!!

For those of us who have been here since the 28th of April, the transition into daily life was a drawn out process, as we had to wait for the rest to arrive on the 5th of May. Once the remaining guys arrived we could finally get into it and begin our daily routines, rosters and Green Bean orders, not in that order.

The Operators have hit the ground running as it seems that there is more involved than what we were told by our predecessors. Thanks guys!!

Those who didn't have a role upon arriving here (OP NOSTOS guys) still found plenty of work: running weapon training, PT, sport and area beautification.

Now with most of us in some sort of routine, life here is a little less chaotic. All in all, we still have smiles on our faces and coffee in our hands!!

CPL Benjamin Biggins

THE JOURNEY OF THE RING-INS

Initially tasked with Combat Net Radio Remediation for OP NOSTOS, with 21 days notice to move, things were not looking good for CPL's Kristen and Mills and the 2 digs, SIG Alcorn and Ashton. But a series of events transpired to get us to Afghanistan.

We made it through the Farewell Parade without spudding in and wrecking our slouch hats, and got on the plane to Dubai. There we completed further inductions (RSO&I) and ate food at the ARAB version of Frontline.

Eventually arriving in Tarin Kowt, we were told that Alpha Squadron didn't know we were coming. Being told we weren't needed was a bit of a letdown. However, FCU took us in out of the cold and we ended up assisting the Geeks with helpdesk duties and moving ATF to a new compound. The construction of weapon un-load bays and the continual weapon training has kept us busy and "out of trouble".

Where to from here? Stay tuned for another chapter in "The Journey of the Ring-ins".

CPL Kristen





*Information Systems Help Desk
with SIG's O'Brien, Harrison, Ashton*

...AND WE'RE OFF!

Our loved ones saw us off at the airport with well wishes, their last kisses, goodbyes and warm hugs. Thoughts of the unknown seeped like a lonely friend wanting to invite themselves in. The nightmares of the Certification Exercise had left us and finally after what seemed like a never ending pre-deployment, we were leaving. Excitement filled the air as we ventured into the deepest part of our imagination. Who knew what lay ahead..?

The flight was eventful to say the least; the first group seemed to find the only thunder storm within the whole Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) and decided to head straight through the middle of it! Well it's funny to say, that ol' Mother Nature does not back down from a challenge, and decided to hit us with a lightning bolt just to settle us down and bring us back to earth.

We landed finally after what felt like a three day flight. With no time to take a break, we were straight into Reception training (RSO&I), yep at 3am!! The next four days is what I'd compare to torture, but this was mandatory. After some very early starts coupled with late nights, we finished the RSO&I and found ourselves heading into Theatre. The excitement started to kick in again and it was only a matter of hours until we were on the ground in Tarin Kowt!

A very busy week of hand-over took place. Then, what had seemed like something always so far away, suddenly became reality: we were in charge of comms! We are here on the ground rolling out services to our customers but in most cases we are reeling in services as TK prepares for its down-size. It's only early days yet and the first chapter is just beginning to write itself. I'm sure that many adventures lay ahead.

Stay tuned...

CPL Owen Brady



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

TARIN KOWT

Wow – we finally made it here.

I am PTE Courtney Bratton, the clerk for Afghan Signal Squadron and I am based in TK. I had a big surprise getting off the plane; my spouse was standing there waiting to greet me. After not being at home with him for 8 months, it was great to see him. We were lucky enough to have 3 weeks together, before he left to go home. It will be 6 months until I am home again.

Looking around at the beautiful scenery is amazing. From the very first morning I woke up I hoped for no dust storms because I just want to see the mountains covered in snow.



As soon as we got here we started the handover from FCU-8. I handed over from CPL Vwendla Templeton – it was good to catch up with her again.

My job from day to day is a lot different from being back at the unit in barracks. It's like being out field but with Wi-Fi, TV and showers. It must be said that the two minute shower, once a day, does take some getting used to.

I have been enjoying the trip so far and working with the people at HQ. Although this may be because since moving in I have realised there is an unlimited amount of chocolate here. I have been told that maybe I will be strapped to a pallet on the Herc for the flight home if I don't control this chocolate craze.

Now for a break...



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

KANDAHAR AIR FIELD

FCU-8 TO FCU-9 HANDOVER/TAKEOVER

Let me start off by saying “HI”!!!” to all the family and friends of deployed personnel on Force Communications Unit IX (FCU-9). SIG Darren Pocock here, and I shall be sharing with you a tale of the changeover from FCU-8 to FCU-9 at Kandahar Air Field (KAF), Camp Baker. I work in the IS Helpdesk at Camp Baker. I came to FCU-9 from 1CSR after being posted there for 2 years. I would also like to say thank you to everyone for the support to their loved ones while on deployment.

It all started Monday 6th of May. The year was 2013, the sun was shining high in the sky, dust was lingering like that one “mate” you have who invites themselves to Valentine’s dinner that was meant for you and your partner... There was a faint whisper from the heavens, blowing the remnants of the (now brown) FCU-8 flag that was flying high and proud outside building “Coogee”.

KAF Flight FCU-8 and FCU-9 stood and watched as the FCU-8 flag was lowered by none other than LCPL Pesa. He was gracious in his movements, like a feather falling from the wings of an angel, never allowing the flag to brush the dusty cement floor. As he lowered his Sony Alpha 57 Digital SLR with an 18-135mm lens, a single tear fell from SIG Khut’s eye as he gazed at his fellow FCU-9 comrades. He could not contain the overwhelming emotional understanding that these few best men shall be by his side for the next 6 months.



Now that LCPL Pesa had successfully lowered the flag it was time for LAC Lucarelli (Luca) to deliver the goods. With confidence in his stride, the FCU-9 flag draped over his left shoulder and a smile that would light up death row, LAC Luca hoisted the flag that would signify world dominance (in Camp Baker) for the next 6 months. Once the flag was successfully elevated to its appropriate altitude, the deed had been done.

It was now time for FCU-8 to pack their things and leave this magical land that only the best get to witness, and time for FCU-9 to take the lead. After some very awe- inspiring words from none other than FLGOFF Langbridge OIC KAF Flight, Geeks and Techs alike were ready to crack into work (and cleaning).

SIG D. Pocock



QUARtermaster's STORE

UAE & TARIN KOWT

Before I start this article to let you all know how we are getting on, I think a quick introduction is needed so family and friends understand the composition and location of the FCU 9 Quartermaster stores staff. The team consists of the following logisticians, based in the countries as shown:

CAPT Simon Morris - UAE
FSGT Andy Thame - UAE
WO2 Pete Sharman - Afghanistan
CPL Justin Hanney - Afghanistan
CPL Scott Knight - UAE
LAC Aaron Goodwin - UAE
LACW Amy Anderson - Afghanistan
PTE Tim Palmer - UAE

The team is made up of Army and RAAF personnel and split up over two separate locations in the UAE and Afghanistan. The team is responsible for managing the unit equipment and accounts, and providing logistical support. Basically in a nutshell for those of you at home, this consists of us having to provide the right thing at the right place at the right time. This isn't always as easy as some people think and involves a lot of planning, implementing and controlling.

Since coming together as a team in a hot and humid Darwin on the 11 Feb, the time has really flown by. The Pre Deployment Training (PDT) package was a great opportunity to hone our skills. We learnt and practiced all the most up to date skills and drills from first aid, to cultural awareness, to shooting. For us as loggies, we also had the additional task of providing all the support to the training. This kept us really busy organising kitting, equipment and meals, in between having to attend the lessons and training ourselves. The PDT also covered a Logistic Information System (LogIS) training phase where we were assessed on our ability to support the unit using the all-electronic log systems. I'm pleased to say that there were no short comings and all the team passed with flying colours. By the end of PDT we had managed to get the whole unit fully suited and booted, and ready to go to war! The training phase in Darwin provided a great opportunity for us to get to know each other and gel as a team, before we took some well-earned leave.

On arrival at Al Minhad Air Base (AMAB) in the UAE we had a great welcome from the FCU-8 Loggies, who were clearly very happy to see us. We know they were happy to see us, because they kept telling us how many days they had left before they flew home. Thanks guys! Before even starting the handover/takeover we had to attend another 4 day in-country training package which was a bit of a burn with some late nights and early mornings. A few



of us thought we were back in basic training at this stage! Finally after being bludgeoned with all the lectures and instructions the package finished. The next day we bid farewell to the Afghan team as they flew into Tarin Kowt (TK). The handover/takeover took just over a week to complete from start to finish and went very well. All the account holders have their equipment and we have been given an excellent starting block by our predecessors. The emphasis is now on the account holders to look after the equipment and to come and see us when they have any problems or need advice.

The facilities and food at AMAB (Camp Cup Cake) are excellent but sadly the team in TK don't have it as plush. However, Pete Sharman tells me that they are all comfortable and are getting 3 square meals a day. They also get the opportunity to go to the USA Mess every now and then for a 'Wok in the Box' and ice cream night. At the time of writing these notes we have been here for just over 4 weeks. The time has gone pretty quick and it doesn't seem like it will be long before some of us start to fly back for leave at this rate. Our work routine is pretty busy and that's how we like it. The TK team are constantly packing and moving equipment, which has a huge burden on the team having to make sure the accounts are all correct. They have also been beavering away getting the stores up and running to their liking. The AMAB team have also been hard charging getting their stores sorted out and moving equipment back and forth from Australia. Unfortunately our time out here has not been uneventful after one member of the team decided to try ripping the front bumper off the AMAB team's Ford SUV. Sorry Tim, it had to be mentioned! I've not heard of any mishaps involving our team up in TK. Tim is the first (and let's hope last) member of the team to be fined by the local police.

On behalf of all Q-Store staff, I would like to thank all partners and family members for your ongoing support during our deployment.

From the Editor... **More Acronyms for Dummies Civvies**



OP NOSTOS- Greek for 'homecoming' and is the name given to remediation activities involved in adjusting the disposition of Australian military forces in Afghanistan to meet Australian Government direction. Got that?

Q Store- Quartermaster's Store: Everyone needs a good Q store. These guys get everything we need. They don't do domestics but they do get us some creature comforts every now and then.

RSO&I- Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (induction in the field for those who speak standard English!)

TK- Tarin Kowt, also known as Tarin Kot

TK TP- Tarin Kowt Troop in Army speak, also known as Tarin Kowt Node to the others



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

KABUL

It's been a fast few months for the Kabul Sig Node, beginning with Induction training and the Up Armoured SUV driving course held at Robertson Barracks, Darwin. This was a lot of fun, teaching us how to avoid the mad traffic over here. The course also made us better drivers at home, or at least that's what most of the guys will tell you!

After leave and the flights over here, we had the summer cycle of training to deal with while getting used to the weather in AMAB. So it was straight off the plane and into RSO&I. During this part of our training we had loads more lectures, some more Explosive Awareness training and shooting to get through, as well as quick calls home to you all.

After that it was off to sunny Afghanistan which has been quite nice up here in the mountains. The snow is still on the peaks and the sky rarely has a cloud. We had a short time to get used to the guys from FCU-8 before they handed us over to the Headquarters staff here. As the weather warms up and the people get used to all of the tall Sigs they have been gifted with, we are getting stuck into the job at hand.

I'll take some time to introduce the guys. In the Geek section we have Eddy, Ty and the lead geek, Flemmo. They do a great job interacting with the people we support the most as well as fixing IPADs and helping people get themselves back on the internet. In the tech section we have big man Ush and Sharpie who make sure that the phones all work and that the satellite dishes point in the right direction. Then we have Kubes and Chris; they are our vault managers, making sure the radios keep working, as well as looking after our paperwork. Our Boss Lt Ng gets to do all the unglamorous jobs, and keeps all of the rogues here on the straight and narrow.

As summer comes around and the dust storms start to blow there are busy times for us ahead. We are looking forward to helping with new projects and upgrades happening all over Kabul. Two of our big jobs will be helping with the construction of the Afghan Officer Training Academy and supporting the team by providing the communications network. We will also have the occasional road trip, which gives us the chance to see some of the city and the Afghan people, as well as people from the NATO mission.

Well that's all for now, we all hope that you are well.

CPL Jarred Usher



THE 'FUN' NIES!

ACRONYM OVERLOAD!

After many years of service in the RAAF, when I first RX'd an EOI WRT applying to Dep with JTF633, TG633.14, TU633.14.1 in the MEAO at AMAB and elsewhere, I thought I was reasonably proficient in the use of acronyms and military jargon..

Translation:

After many years of service in the Royal Australian Air Force, when I first received an Expression of Interest (EOI) with respect to (WRT) applying to deploy with Joint Task Force 633 (JTF633), Task Group 633.14 (TG633.14), Task Unit 633.14.1 (TU633.14.1) in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) at Al Minhad Air Base (AMAB) and elsewhere, I thought I was reasonably proficient in the use of acronyms and military jargon.

OMG, whoops I meant: Oh My God! Was I wrong!

We all gathered in Darwin in February 13 for force preparation with a mixture of Air Force, Army and Navy personnel. I have since realised that I was and still am, a mere novice when it comes acronyms. Here I am writing this and thinking, if I sometimes struggle with acronyms and military terminology, how in the hell do our families and friends even understand half of what we say.

So below is a small list of acronyms and military-to-civilian translations to help friends and families understand what their loved ones are trying to say.

Air Force	Navy	Army	Civilian
Ablutions	Head	Sh&^%er	Toilet
Rumour	Scuttle butt	Dirt	Gossip
Yup	Aye Aye	Sah	Yes
Rifle	Gun	Gat	Weapon
Hit the Hay	Hit the bunk	Rack out	Go to sleep
Wall	Bulkhead	Ouch, who put that there	Wall
Zoomer	Pusser	AJ	Serving Members
F you	F you	F you	***** censored. But at least it's universal!

Acronym	Meaning
GTG	Got or Good to Go.
FYI/A	For your Information or Action.
DTG	Date time group (Usually in Greenwich Mean Time)
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major (Normally, the man with a big stick, except FCU-9's RSM isn't allowed one, so has big boots instead)
SSM	Squadron Sergeant Major (The man with a smaller stick, but is allowed one)
CO	Commanding Officer (The Boss)
ACK	Acknowledged
EKO	Early Knock Off

Take care, stay safe and we will all see you when we return home!

FSGT Iain McGowan



MORE 'FUN' NIES!

From the TK Techs

To the tune of – “I Was Only Nineteen” recorded by Redgum, 1983

Our families saw the farewell parade at Robo Barracks parade ground.
It was a long build-up from the school.
FCU-IX was the next to tour, and it was us who got the call.
We did Hamel, 'n' the CERTEX before we left.

And families filled the airport as we marched down to the plane
Posts on Facebook shows us old and fat and green.
And there's us with our laptops, and our collard shirts and jeans.
God help us, we were mostly in our 30's.

From AMAB, riding C130's, to the dust in Tarin Kowt
Most of us no longer virgins to a Herc.
But we made our rooms a home, water bottles and pinups on the lockers
And a hazy desert sunset through the dust.

And can you tell me, Brenno, why I still can't get to sleep?
And night-time's filled with snoring from a lot of tired geeks
And what's these rocks that are in my nose, can you tell me what it means?
God help me, we were mostly in our 30's.

A six month operation when each day is just like the last
It's groundhog day, all over again.
But there was no job too big or small that you couldn't palm to the nightshift
So Kimmy closed his eyes and thought about something else.

Then someone yelled out "Orders!" and the bloke behind me swore
We were locked in there for hours, then a God almighty roar
Batman kicked his toe the day that Westy hit the gym,
God help me, he was going on ROCTFA in June.

I can still see Murphy, drinking scotches at the Normandy Hotel
On a thirty-six hour bender in Brisbane
And I can still hear Jock, lying screaming with his SCA
Til the Q&A came and killed the bloody row.

And FCU 8 didn't mention weapons tests and non-techs
And the orders that our Troopy gave us never seemed quite real.
And I caught some bits and pieces and I'm not sure what it means.
God help me, we were mostly in our 30's.

And can you tell me, Brenno, why I still can't get to sleep?
And why the shaking bunk chills me to my feet?
And what are these rocks that are in my nose, can you tell me what it means?
God help me, we were mostly in our 30's.

