



THE STAR

Issue 3, July 2013

Welcome to the latest edition of The Star.

There has been a longer gap between editions of The Star as our editor took some time out to cruise the Eastern Mediterranean. Welcome back Sonia. I hear the holiday was a good one.

The half way mark of our deployment is rapidly approaching and we're well into the leave relief period, also known as ROCL or ROCTFA (I'm sure there'll be an Editor's Note to explain these terms). Our members fall into one of three categories: those that have had leave; those that are on leave; and those that are looking forward to leave. To those that have had the leave, welcome back. For those on leave you won't be reading this anyway and to those of us yet to take leave it won't be long now.

You may notice a significant change to the tone and content of The Star in this edition. We're all well and truly settled into our work routines now. To combat the seven-days-a-week work routine, I am seeing the ways people look to entertain themselves away from the work place. I've always been a strong believer in a work-life balance. I'm delighted at how our FCU members are applying this philosophy in their various ways. Some of the articles in this edition bare testament to their approach to balance.

AMAB continues to surprise me with how hot it can get. Our Afghanistan based members like to refer to AMAB as Camp Cupcake. I think it has something to do with how easy they think we have it here! However, I note that everyone who has passed through here on their way to leave destinations comments on just how hot it is. Someone commented recently that AMAB was more suited to baking cupcakes than eating them. It's not over yet, either! As Summer rolls on the days get more humid and the temperatures regularly approach 50°C. Cool showers are a thing of the past. No matter which tap you use, the water is warm. This is the last thing you need after an exercise session at the gym.

The gym is one of the most popular diversions for people and even I've been known to frequent the building occasionally. Watching movies and TV shows are other popular past times. However, there is one mystery that I've not been able to work out yet. I'm sure when we first arrived here in May there were a lot more people with blond hair. I thought the sun would help but I swear they must be dying it to brown and auburn and... On the other hand there are a good few people who've decided hair is over-rated and have removed everything from their head. I have to be honest; some of the heads look OK but some of them – well, thank goodness for dark glasses.

Let me close this contribution by thanking everyone for their effort, support and good humour. I don't just mean the members of FCU. All our family and friends are an essential part of this team. This deployment is a team effort and I couldn't be happier with how the team is travelling. Thank you one and all.

Until next time.

Regards



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

AL MINHAD AIR BASE - SSM

Hello from SQN HQ, both the OC and I intend to regularly contribute to the Star on a rotational basis.

Well it's been nearly 2 months now and the guys are well and truly into the swing of things. At this stage most have experienced the day to day issues they will be facing over the coming months, and are coming to terms with them.

The guys have had to learn a lot of stuff very fast. Everything from learning to live in a small room with 6 or 7 other people, communal toilets and showers, constant dealings with irate customers whose printers don't work, and even in some cases a complete server rebuild (whatever that is). Some of that very steep learning curve has been extremely difficult but in just about all cases, we adjust and move on.

The OC and I have been very fortunate to visit the guys in Kabul and in Kandahar. In both cases, they have been very hospitable and shown us the very unique challenges faced in their different locations. Whilst the board walk in Kandahar has to be seen to be believed, the highlight of our visit was the Thai restaurant in Kabul. The meal was excellent, as was the amusement provided by SIG Fleming and his cross gender friend.

Here in Tarin Kowt, the Troop have been very busy moving a lot of different organisations into new work areas, as well as doing their trade jobs. We have also had the opportunity to conduct a couple of range shoots. The guys enjoyed both shoots, a good opportunity to do some realistic shooting in a slightly more relaxed environment. It was also an opportunity to qualify some of the guys in different weapon systems.

We have also passed a very important milestone, the ROCL/ROCTFA period. By the time you read this, FSGT Danny Waldron will be enjoying his ROCL home in Australia with his family and the rest of the SQN will start rotating through in the coming months. At the time I am writing this, I only have 39 days, 16 hours and 20 mins till I'm home to collect my brand new midnight pearl Harley Davidson Fat Bob. And it will be good to see you too, Cheryl.

Whilst we are left short-handed when the guys are away, no one complains as they know it will be their turn shortly. Getting the guys back into the swing of it on their return will be the hard bit.

As Tarin Kowt continues to draw down, the work load will increase, so that will make those days go quicker. The stories that the guys come back with from their leave will also be something to look forward to and I'm sure some will be passed on in future articles.

WO2 Phill Prosser
SSM



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

GREAT NEWS!

PTE Bratton, Afghanistan Signals Squadron Clerk, promoted to Lance Corporal with effect 01 Jul 13.

You might remember LCPL Bratton from her article in our first edition. If you don't here's a reminder or what her Officer Commanding said about her:

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.

And from her own pen:

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.

LCPL Bratton continues to eat chocolate and keep those around her sane with her disturbingly positive attitude. We're pleased to report we've not had to book pallet space for her flight home. Congratulations again on your promotion Courtney, well deserved.



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

CAMP BAKER, KANDAHAR



Hello, I am ABCIS Luke Zantvoort: AB standing for Able Seaman and CIS standing for Communications and Information Systems. That's me on the far left of the photo. I am a member of the Royal Australian Navy.

I am one of six Navy personnel in FCU 9, and as my counterparts in the photo are spread between AMAB and Bahrain, this makes me the token Navy guy in Afghanistan. I work in the hustle and bustle of the IS Helpdesk at Camp Baker, Kandahar, learning and putting to practice a world of IT skills that only geeks have ever heard of.

Prior to joining FCU 9 I was a member of a patrol boat crew working border protection out of Darwin. I was working mainly as a member of the boarding party. Working in the dusty conditions of Kandahar is a welcome change to the hectic schedule of the patrol boats.

The Kandahar IS helpdesk is where I spend my working hours. It is a busy place with many of our customers requiring help with a mixture of IT problems. It has been a steep learning curve for me, transitioning from my role on the patrol boats where IT takes a back seat to other forms of communications specific to Navy. Working with the well-oiled team here at the helpdesk, a mixture of Air Force and Army, has made that learning quick and easy and we are endeavouring to do a stellar job of servicing the many customers that appear at our helpdesk window on a regular basis.

When I'm not elbows deep in IT, I am spending my spare time doing a range of things. I visit the Boardwalk, use Skype to stay in contact with my girlfriend Caitlyn in Darwin, enjoy a movie in the movie room with the team, or go to the gym. I am from Adelaide originally and a keen supporter of the Crows. Unfortunately their form hasn't enabled me to sport my Crows jumper at the helpdesk yet.... but I am still hopeful of a turn around.... GO THE CROWS!!!



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

TARIN KOWT

News from the J36X Cell Equipo

Time here is starting to speed up and the countdown till our mid-way holidays is definitely on.

My role as an Equipo....oops Q'ie (Army term!!) is mainly completing the transactions for all our equipment that moves within the MEAO and back to Australia. I work in a small team of 4 military members (all Army except myself!) and 4 civilians from America and the UK. Our section is soon to contain 3 Andersons... just to confuse everyone!

It took a bit of time for me to get used to the Army way of things and learning how much they love their extra paperwork compared to my normal role in the RAAF at home, but overall I am enjoying the experience here (though not so much the dust, heat and 2 min showers).

I am getting involved with as much sport and gym sessions as I can, so far taking part in Netball and Dodgeball competitions, and am happy to have access to WIFI most of the day to keep up with the important Facebook happenings!

To my family at home, Mum, Emma and Ben, love you all and thankyou for all your care packages and messages to keep my spirits up. To my man, Andrew, you're keeping a massive smile on my face, love you lots and not long till I see you in Thailand!

LACW Amy Anderson

NEW ACRONYMS IN THIS EDITION...

ROCL - Relief Out of Country Leave

ROCTFA – Relief Out of Country Travel Assistance



GULF STATE SQUADRON

QATAR

Greetings to all from Qatar. My name is CPL Paul Angus and I'm the NCO in charge of the "Oh my God!!! It's early shift". For an accurate view on life in Qatar, just check out U2's video for 'Vertigo'. For the price of a short walk from the accommodation blocks to the car park you get a free dermal abrasion, peeling off several layers of unwanted skin, even if you didn't actually need it.

In case you were not aware, Qatar is an Arabic state just off to the right of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf. It's rich in oil and natural gas and is considered the world's richest country. Even so, the local currency "Qatari Riyal" is only worth about 30 Aussie cents. Qatar has also been hit hard by the oil crisis, with a litre of fuel jumping from AUS 11 cents to 28 cents.



The political Headquarters of the Taliban is located here, apparently it is not cool to stand out the front and take photos. The armed guards tend to get a bit angry, so here's a shot – you even get to see the angry guard. I didn't quiet catch his name, but sounded very much like "Steve".

If you were ever thinking of visiting us here in Qatar to get the free face peel, here is a must-do list during your stay:

- The swimming pools, I hear the water is great, I personally haven't made it past the 'viewing deck' but others have.
- Fast food outlets, nothing says 'We are at War' more than Dairy Queen and Arby's, except maybe Baskin and Robbins.
- The BAM – (Big-Ass-Mall) located in Doha, for the shopping that you can't afford, but if you want to see what an amusement park inside a shop looks like, then this is for you.
- Thursdays 'Wing Day' at the Dining Facility (DFAC), where you can eat your body weight in chicken wings, served in four different ways.

Life's pretty good here, the work is steady and the food is excellent. You can get free chocolates, soft drinks and ice creams 24 hrs a day. Need a crunchy caramel frappe latte at 3am? Yeah ...



GULF STATE SQUADRON

AL MINHAD AIR BASE

Hello all, I am Leading Aircraftsman Aaron Goodwin (Goody). We are Air Force lead thus I will be using Air Force terms. I could inform you all in detail about how the LOG personnel are tracking but let's keep it brief. Palmer and Flight (Andy) are growing mo's, Scotty can't wait for ROCL, the LOGO (Simon) is loving the Lions in the rugby and I am still tall. I have decided to write about the main attraction of my last R&R run.

In early June Nicky, Scotty and I headed into Dubai with the main purpose of visiting the Burj Khalifa (The Burj).

What is the Burj Khalifa you may ask? The Burj Khalifa is the world's tallest building/tower standing at 828m tall (163 floors). The record was previously held by Toronto's CN tower which stands 553m.

Construction on the Burj started in January 2004 and was officially opened on 04 January 2010. The Burj is a multi-purpose building and home to 9000 residents who live in studio, one, two, three or four bedroom apartments. It has 37 floors of corporate suites, and contains the Armani Hotel. The hotel will cost you from \$700 up to \$7000 Australian dollars a night.

If you are planning to visit the Burj I recommend the "At the Top" experience. The "At the Top" experience is an one hour tour that consists of a long wait in a lobby, a long walk down a long corridor (pictures to look at if you're into that kind of thing), then a quick elevator ride (30 seconds for 124 floors) to a high observation deck, to look at the scenery from a ridiculous height and say, "Wow, we are high up."



You can pre-book tickets on line for 125 ding dong (the slang term for the UAE currency, the dirham), which is about \$40 Australian. Immediate entry tickets will cost you 400 ding dong, about \$110 Australian.

The tour was a great experience and I recommend it to everyone. I have included a couple of photos of our day.

Sighing off,
Goody.



GULF STATE SQUADRON

AL MINHAD AIR BASE

Well the boys from Qatar, otherwise affectionately known as "Qatards" by the rest of our FCU buddies, would like to thank the Editor for pointing out and highlighting our spelling mistake to everyone in the previous edition (what a difference a letter makes). Yes it was definitely meant to say tub, no really, not tube. We can blame the WOFF for this one, not CPL Kyte, who thought a quick tub would sound better than quick rinse.



Hello my name is WOFF Nihal (knee-hull) Ranasinghe (run-a-sing-her) otherwise known as "Rany" and I'm the Nodal Commander here in Qatar. My Name is the Sri Lankan equivalent of John Smith. I know we had an Idiots Guide for Civvies in the first edition of The Star, so this one is for anyone else who struggles with anything more than "Ranny", "Rani", "Rannie", "Renna", "Renne". Yes sometimes, even "Rany" has been a struggle for some. I have been contemplating during this deployment changing my name to "R" or maybe just a symbol like Prince. That's me in the photos; I'm the only one here who doesn't have to work on his sun tan.



We had the CO and UWOFF visit us at the start of June and were literally able to give them a taste of life in Qatar (it tasted like sand). It was a moral busting visit for everyone here. [Editors' note: We're not sure whether this is correct or he meant *morale boosting*? P.S.



the CO is denying everything ... Rany, you shouldn't make it so easy!] We were pleased to see someone else from FCU-9, who we are geographically isolated from. The visit comprised of audits of our processes and record keeping, mixed with moments of hilarity.

The CO was introduced to the new SGT, Claire Mitchell. His first words in meeting her were, "Hello, I have been checking you out today". The poor SGT had a very worried and bemused look on her face. The CO had earlier that morning been verifying her details in the Unit Register as part of his compliance checks. The UWOFF promptly advised the CO that he may want to reconsider his introduction when meeting people for the first time. I think he took this one onboard.

It has been mentioned that through the Newsletter we look like we are having too much fun. This has been no accident. The fun helps makes it easier being away from home and loved ones and makes the bad stuff a little bit easier to deal with. Having a laugh, whilst maintaining our professionalism, has been the hallmark of this rotation so far. It doesn't however diminish the very real dangers being faced by some of our mates currently.

The CO has come up with a great little acronym: "SLOP", which underpins everything from how we conduct ourselves to how we do our business during this deployment. It has nothing to do with food, nor anything to do with being sun smart in the MEAO (Slip, Slop Slap).

S stands for SAFETY,

LOOK out for mates,

OPENMINDEDNESS (being a joint unit, the way you've always done something may not be the best),

PROFESSIONALISM.

The CO has unfortunately taken the Unit Warrant Officer's advice and not made it *compulsory* for us to have "fun" while doing this.

Ok! Ok! I know you are all wondering about the top picture. The CO had another first whilst visiting Qatar, his first R&R (Rest & Relaxation) run. This was a rare break from his normal 12 to 16+ hour working day. We even managed to make time to play a game call "pretend". That bottle of sparkling wine and beers were in fact sparkling water and near-beer. It looked like beer, but the taste was nearer to something else, beer wasn't one of them. The water by all reports tasted like water.

In signing off, we would like to take the opportunity to recognise the fantastic job our families are doing back home in dealing with the day to day difficulties of keeping the home front going. It's been greatly appreciated and makes a huge contribution to helping us do our job well.

A big "Thank You" from WOFF Ranasinghe and the boys from Qatar.

PS: No news on the cricket, I think we have the Poms scared.



GULF STATE SQUADRON

QATAR

G'day everyone, my name is Ben Cumferford and I'm one of the CPLs in Qatar. So far our time has been eye opening to say the least; however I'm slowly coming to grips with all the peculiarities that are the American way of doing things.

In my first month or so here, I discovered a list on the wall at the gyms dedicated to the brave soles who were able to call themselves members of the '1000lb Club'. Its sole purpose is to give bragging rights to those lifters able to complete three main lifts of a single squat, bench press and dead lift, totalling 1000lb. As I'm an aspiring lifter, I decided to give it a shot and totalled 1195lbs (542kg) and 10th position, while also becoming the first Australian on the honour board.

Due to my exploits in the gym, some of the US guys asked if LAC Jackson and I would like to compete in the upcoming power lifting competition called 'The Strongest in the AOR (Area of Responsibility)'. In order to keep my reputation as Number 10 intact, we took up the challenge to be tested against not only Qatar members, but also against other members from all the US bases throughout the MEAO.



Results were based on pound for pound lifting of all individuals. I was lucky enough to come in 5th for Qatar, totalling 1200lbs (545kg) for only 211lb (96kg) bodyweight. Jacko came in with a total of 650lb (295kg) at a body weight of 147lb (67kg) which is nothing short of outstanding for the lightest person at the competition. We would like to get involved with another competition before the end of the tour, and who knows, maybe next time we can have a bigger Aussie contingent?

Some of the other key events that we've been involved in since our last update were the Fourth of July celebrations with our US partners and Bastille Day festivities with our French neighbours, by bringing a little bit of Australia to their fun runs. However I drew the line at entering the hot dog eating contest..... that's a little too American.

Time has simply flown by, with ROCL/ROCTFA underway and the solid groove of day to day living becoming the norm. Our weekly 'Fat Saturday' feast of Pizza Hut or Arby's and a Dairy Queen Blizzard is one of our rituals that has become a favourite of mine. Not that I over indulge..... much. Overall, morale is high and everyone is making the best of the opportunity we've been given before it's time to pack our things and head home to our family and friends.

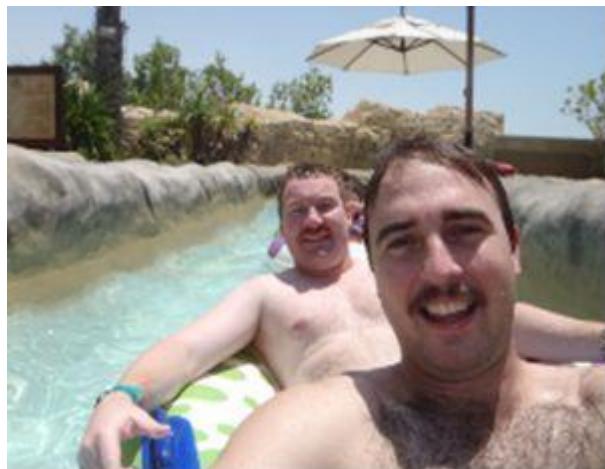
GULF STATE SQUADRON

AL MINHAD AIR BASE

A day in the life of FCU at Camp Cupcake, as we are known.....

Lips here, and it is my duty to finally squash all the rumours about how easy we have it here at AMAB.

The day starts like any normal day, wake up, shower eat, go to work and BAM!, you'll be stung by "raffle ticket sales guy"...



After that epic duty, you can understand you might be feeling a little worn out and may need some down time. Why not hit Wild Wadi...

Now for you people new to Dubai, Wild Wadi is one of the two water parks here, very similar to Wet' n' Wild back home. The main difference here is that since FCU have arrived, the locals have accommodated the fact that we get tired legs from walking around the massive node on base, so they built water slides that go up! Yep, walking up stairs to get to the slides is for chumps.



Slide going **up** to the main slides



So now you could imagine that we are fairly tired from all of the sitting in tubes and floating, so it is time to relieve the body by removing some of the weight carrying issues. Off to iFly Dubai. Now this is just what the exhausted body needs... Well, that is the day just about done. Barely enough time to fit in a big steak, hop on the bus and zzzzzzz.....

Well I guess we will have another big day tomorrow, you guys just don't understand how hard it is sometimes.

(Sigh) Think we might go see some penguins....



Editor's note: Yes, there are real penguins in Dubai! This is a random photo of the penguins from the 'Ski Dubai' website

BREAKING NEWS.....

AL MINHAD AIR BASE

COMD SIG MAKES IT WITH THE BIG DOGS

Congratulations to LAC Jeffrey who has found his way onto the wall of fame with the JTF633 Command Team. This is an honour normally reserved for much higher ranks and positions.

Although this *was* a feat made possible by asking the photography cell for a favour and hanging the photo himself, LAC Jeffrey is receiving acknowledgements from members of all ranks throughout AMAB and giving the FCU members, and some of the HQ members, a good laugh at the idea that the Commander's Signalman finds himself within the same circle as the JTF633 Commander, Deputy Commander, Chief Of Staff and the RSM.

FSGT Luke Walker has a giggle as LAC Neu drilled the fixture upon which the infamous photograph is now hanging.



The Wall of Honour: Note the appropriate position of the COMD SIG



MORE BREAKING NEWS.....

AL MINHAD AIR BASE

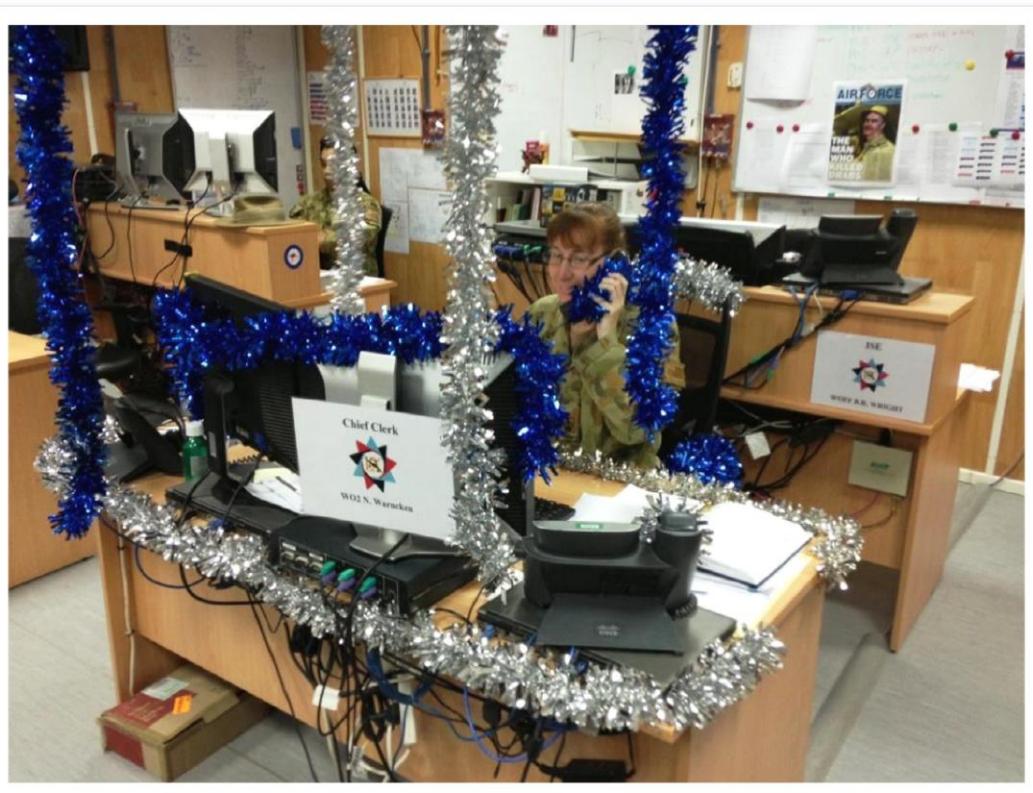
28th July is Warrant Officer Class 2 Naomi Warncken's birthday. She is our Chief Clerk and as a modern military runs on its paperwork we would be lost without her. Some might prefer being lost to some of the paperwork she gets us to complete, but she continues to assure us it's for our own good. From all of us on FCU,

Happy Birthday Nomes

Good form precludes me from telling you her age but I do have a riddle ... you might need a calculator.

Think of a number, any whole number. Multiply this number by 3. Multiply the result by itself. Add the digits of the result repeatedly until you reach a single digit (e.g. 5432 becomes 14, which becomes 5). Place a 1 in front of the digit you found. Place a 2 in front of the same digit. Multiply these numbers together (e.g. the digit 5 becomes 15 x 25). Multiply by 5. Multiply each digit of this number together. Divide by 10. Add 1.

Now as I have absolutely no way of knowing, out of the infinite possibilities available to you, what number you started with; there may be a very remote chance that your answer is a very important one to our Chief Clerk.

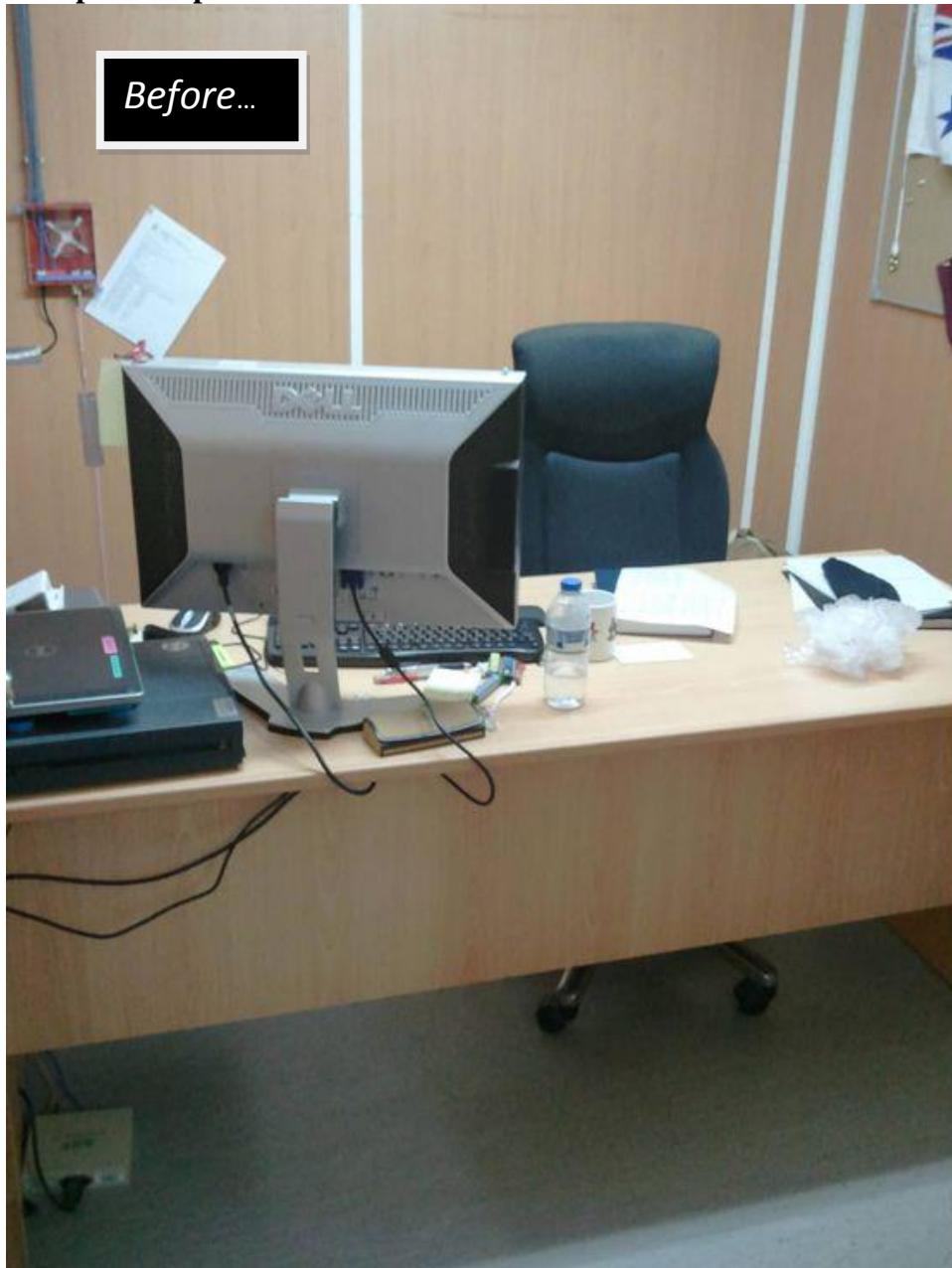


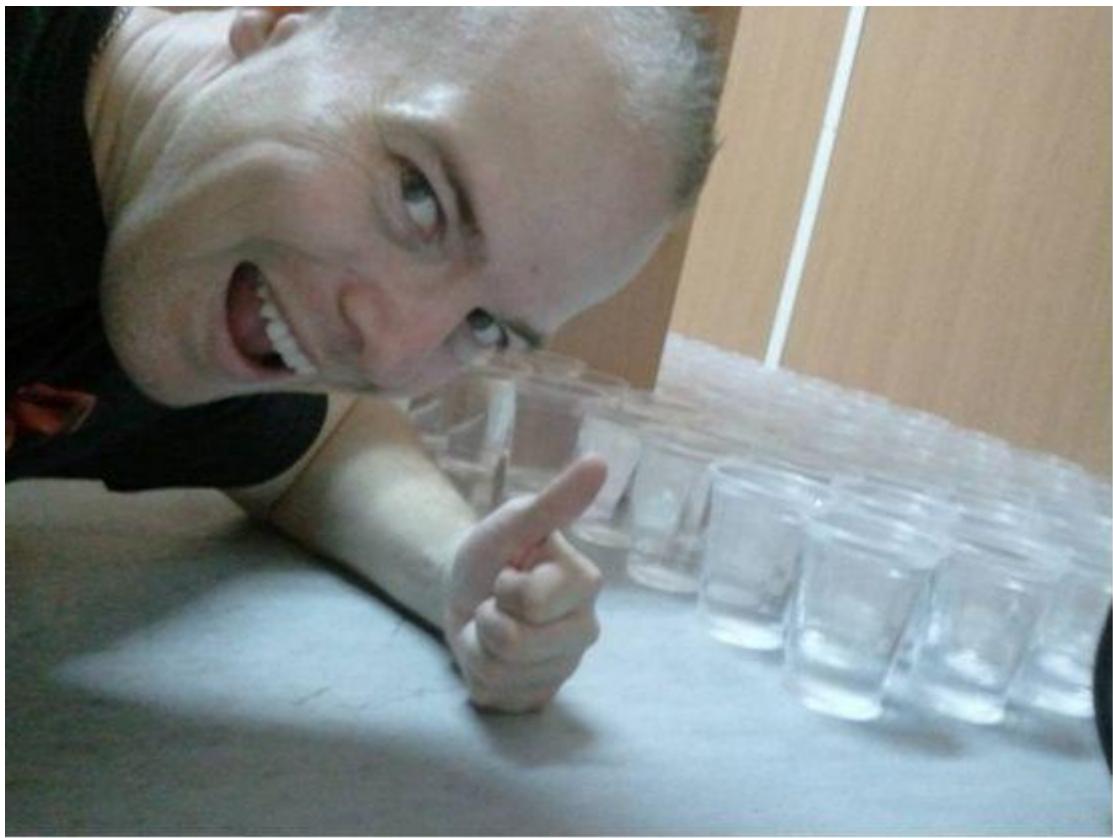
The 'Fun'ies!

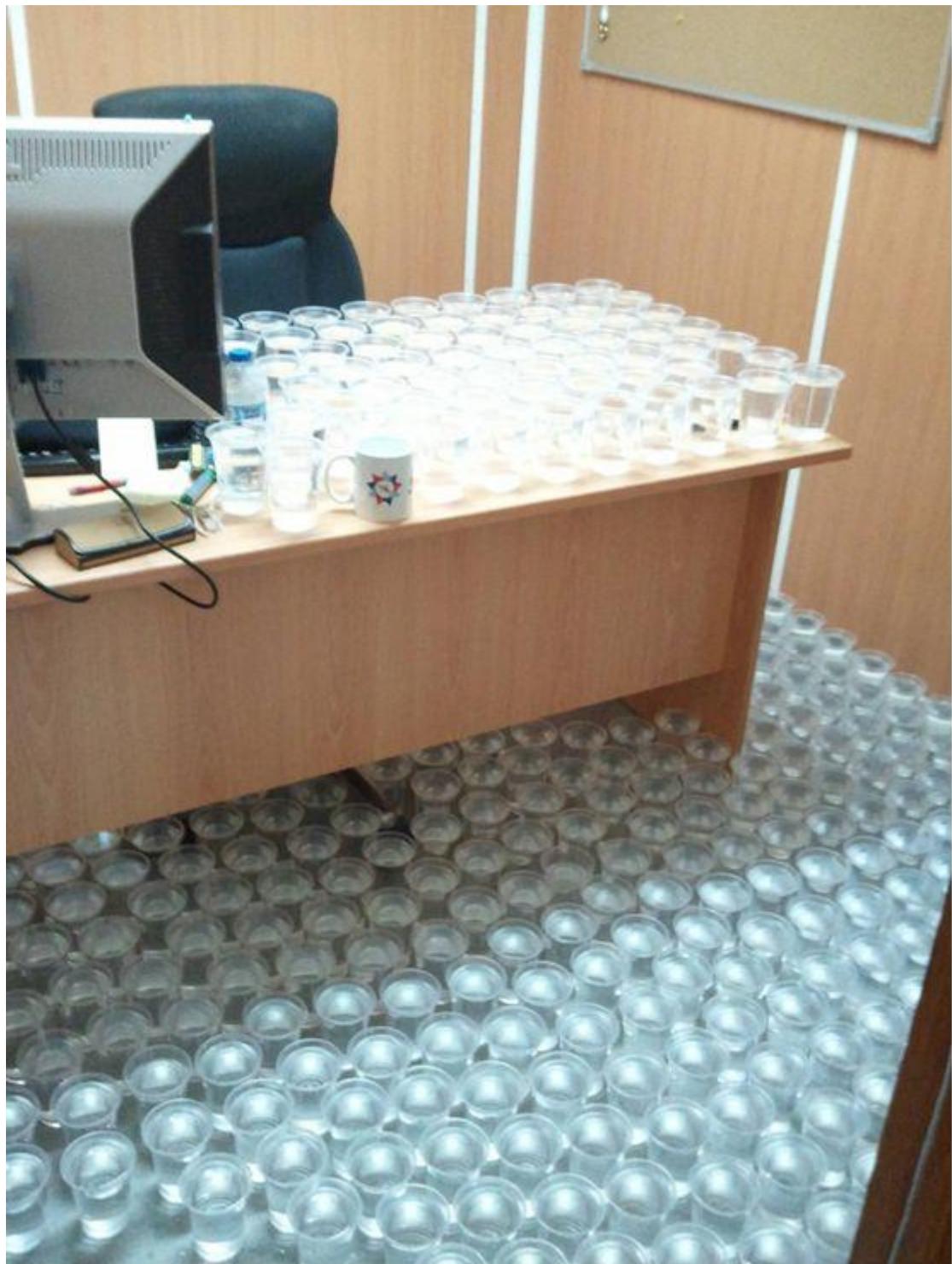
Making the Naval Boss Feel at Home

LEUT James Gowling (OC GSS) recently returned to his office from time spent on a break, to discover “the doings” of LAC Grant Clapton. This could/should have been seen as a nice gesture from Clappo, bringing the atmosphere of the sea to a Naval Officer suffering while stuck in a desert. But as we here all know, LEUT Gowling (although seeing the funny side to this), has plans..... Clappo will pay!!

They say that pictures paint a thousand words:







Foot Note: LEUT Gowling cleaned it all up by himself!

..... and knows where Clappo sleeps!!



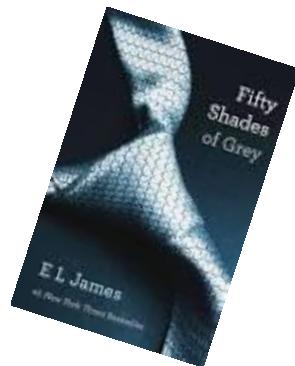
50 SHADES OF THE SSM...

We all know that the SSM is a big, bad, tough man, who stems from the Corps of Cavalry and most of the time comments that he wishes he was still there. At any mention of the Cavalry Corps or big guns, he jumps around with a huge grin and a rush of blood ready to defend and recite stories from “the old days” in the Corps.

Now, the SSM fills most of his days wandering around the TK Node checking on the welfare of the soldiers and airmen/women, instilling discipline and sitting at his desk learning to touch type the one or two reports he has to complete.

But recently, during his short visit to Kandahar, a book was found in his office.....

Now in his spare time, he has been caught reading his book. It is now his all-time favourite book.



Oh, and he has heard it is being made into a movie. So the daily search on his tablet begins (I mean, you can only watch Twilight so many times).....



**Oh, and Happy Half
Century Birthday SSM
for the 8th July.**

For his birthday present he requested the next book - 50 Shades Darker.

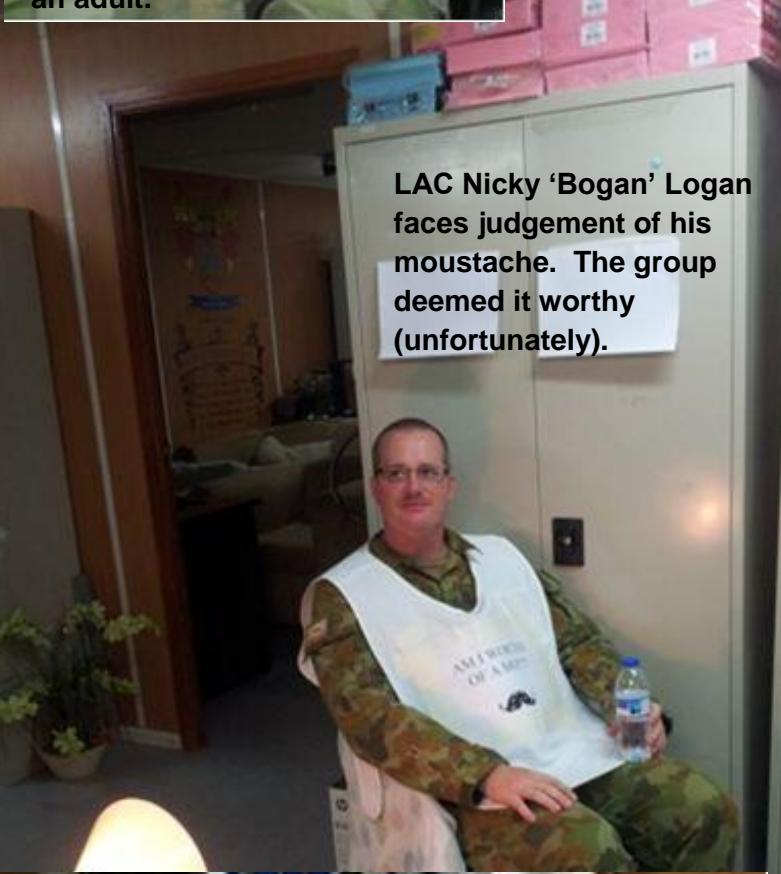
Drafted by Pte Courtney Bratten.
Edited & Released by WO2 Brandt Grollmus.



LAC Mason struggles to remove a washer from his finger. Yep, apparently he is an adult.



SGT Lacey and LS Bevan pick up brass after a shoot. FSGT Walker, helpful as usual.



LAC Nicky 'Bogan' Logan faces judgement of his moustache. The group deemed it worthy (unfortunately).



CPL Martyn looking as pretty as can be for his evening with Bieber!



LAC Jeffrey gets hyped on Red Bull.



LAC Clapton demonstrates the dangers of too much Red Bull.



AB Ryan practices with his invisible rifle before he takes a crack at the real thing.