



THE STAR

Issue 5, Sept 2013

Welcome to the latest edition of The Star.

WGCDR Pert is away on leave in Europe, enjoying some well-earned rest and quality time with Mrs P. In his absence I get to be the Acting/CO (that's the same as Temporary/CO for my RAAF colleagues). I have a day job and that is the Executive Officer for FCU-IX – normally referred to as 'XO' or 'X'; I like 'X' it implies a level of glamour and mystique to the role that is inversely proportional to the reality. Anyway, as WGCDR Pert isn't here, I get the honour of writing the introductory few words to the latest newsletter – here goes...



In WGCDR Pert's absence, I have had to wear the CO's hat on more than one occasion and I am grateful for all the support I have had from FCU-IX in this role. But it has not been all hard work (the Acting J6 has been doing that – thanks Brett). Over the last fortnight or so we (the Unit WOFF and I) have enjoyed a night out with the Brits at their Battle of Britain commemorative sunset ceremony, were invited to the Transfer of Authority ceremony for the new Commander Joint Task Force 633 and we also took the opportunity to officially open the ostentatious awning CPL Allan Gauld managed to get fitted over the entrance to the Help Desk building at the AMAB Node...why Allan? Why?

The last two weeks or so have not been *all* cocktail parties (alcohol free) and sunset ceremonies. Our personnel have continued to work hard and the unwavering support we get from our families and friends helps us focus on the task at hand. Most people have now had their leave or are on it as I write. We have only a couple of members yet to take a well-earned vacation and then we will be preparing in earnest to handover and transfer to our successors. The light at the end of the tunnel is clearly visible, approaching fast, and accompanying it will be FCU-10. Clearly 'till then we still have a job to do and I am as impressed, as the boss ever was, by the continued effort of our FCU-IX members. So thank you to all who have contributed in this latest edition and for sharing your thoughts and moments with your colleagues, families and friends.

Normal services will be resumed for the next edition of The Star. I've enjoyed my brief exposure to Command, and am looking forward to the Boss getting back.



Martin Gellini



FCU HQ

UNIT WARRANT OFFICER

WOFF Graham Schilling here. It's been a while since I've contributed to *The STAR* directly but I'm always here in the background assisting my wife Sonia to herd the cats into a polished newsletter for you. I think you'll agree she's doing a wonderful job.



Recently some of the headquarters staff took an hour out to visit the local camel dairy. Yes, camel dairy. It's just five minutes down the road and when the wind is right (or more correctly, wrong) we get to smell its presence in the morning. It smells like any cow dairy.

Milk from the camels is sold plain, flavoured and turned into chocolate. When I told Sonia (chocolate fan and connoisseur) we'd visited their shop, I received the natural question you're all probably thinking.... "What does camel chocolate taste like?"

While I like chocolate a lot, sometimes too much, I am by no means a connoisseur. So the best I could come up with was, "It tastes like regular chocolate." This standard man response was not deemed acceptable. I have since received the pictured supply in a care package for the sole purpose of personal growth.

The verdict ... I'd say it is closest to Lindt. We can all rest easier now.

In an attempt to appease the boss (Sonia, not the CO), I bought a sample pack and sent it to Ruth, our daughter, for her birthday. Firstly, I hope for Sonia's sake Ruth still remembers how to share and secondly, I look forward to an expert adjudication on taste shortly.



(Editor's note: Never fear...I will ensure my participation in this important cross-cultural fact finding mission! I may even undertake my own multi-brand approach to test the accuracy of previous results...purely for science, of course!)

(From left to right) MAJ Daniel Lee, Me, the Boss, Temporary Boss (SQNLDR Martin Gellini), WOFF Benjamin Wright, WOFF Brett Parker and (front) CAPT Julie Appleby, enjoying the taste tests at Al Nassma Camel Dairy.



AFGHANISTAN SIGNAL SQUADRON

SQUADRON SERGEANT MAJOR

Well the deployment is very quickly approaching yet another milestone, the end of the leave period. At the time of writing this, most of the SQN has returned from their leave and the last groups are away. Some of the stories that are coming from those who have returned could write a few articles just on their own.

The locations SQN members have travelled to are pretty amazing. The majority with families returned to Australia to spend time with their partners and children. If they were lucky, (or unlucky, depends how you see it) they scored a school holiday period. Some of the younger members travelled all over the world, with the majority ending up in Europe. There must be something about cheap beer and European women.

As the guys return from leave, their reactions are varied, but generally fit into two categories. The first, and I think the majority, go through a post-leave 'blues' period where they would much rather be where they just came from. The 'blues' usually only last a few days, dependant on how much they enjoyed their leave, before getting back into the swing of things. The second group just slot straight back into the routine and don't experience anything.

It doesn't matter which group they are in, all can't wait to tell their mates what they got up to! Those who took leave earlier in the deployment are the most keen to hear the stories.

As for me, I had a fantastic time with my wife, Cheryl, and new baby back in Darwin. Note the order I have put that, Chez. The baby was delivered my first day home, so I got to spend as much time as possible with her. Certainly she has fit into the household very quickly; both Mum and Dad are very pleased with her. Baby and Dad went out on lots of occasions so as to get to know each other and we both saw many establishments that provide liquid refreshments.

The next major goal the SQN needs to prepare for is ensuring everything is organised for the arrival and handover of FCU-10. That will be a major task to ensure all equipment is correctly prepared and serviced and that we give the incoming guys the best possible handover for their deployment.

So for those asking which group I fit into... group one, the very depths of depression, with no sign of it easing. You try giving up a baby like this without pining for her!

WO2 Phill Prosser.





THE BAHRAIN LIFE

Greetings from the Kingdom of Bahrain
CPOCIS Rick Maude

Hello again from the Kingdom of Bahrain. Life here continues to be quite busy. From a work point of view, several Business Cases have been written and put forward to upgrade our communications and IT networks, and not to mention upgrade the most important network of all... the internet at the Australia Defence Personnel's residence, 'The Pink Palace'. Well, enough of that boring work talk, let's get onto some more interesting subjects.

The weather... well what can I say when you live in the desert: it's been hot, however the Bahraini summer is coming to a close and the average daily temperature has dropped to about 39°C. We have had some very hot days lately: last week, I got into our car at about 1pm in the afternoon. The car was telling me it was a balmy 48 degrees. Not bad considering it was in our garage!!!

Bahrain is well known for its hot weather (thanks Captain Obvious!), shopping, but mostly for the fantastic food available here. Throughout history, the region has been occupied by the French and Portuguese, which means that the many coffee shops have delicious pastries, cakes and tarts (so I've been told). Not to mention the Indian sweet pastries and cakes available in the markets. Our local eatery, *The Yum Yum Tree* is a local food hall serving freshly cooked Arabic, Asian and European dishes. I have befriended an Egyptian gentleman who is the chef at the Arabic food stall. His food is fantastic, full of the freshest ingredients including Australian and NZ beef and lamb. He has started teaching me how to speak Arabic and now I can order without the language barrier resulting in a chicken dinner when I wanted lamb.



There was some excitement near the US Base here early in the month. An apartment block that was being built caught on fire. Luckily, all the workers got out of the building very quickly and nobody was injured. However, the fire gutted the building and restricted our access to the base.

As I said earlier it's been a busy time here in Bahrain since my last newsletter. Rest assured that all of the Navy team here are safe and well, but working hard. Shortly we will be making preparations for our handover to the next batch of people coming up here to experience the Bahrain life. This will be a welcomed milestone, as shortly after my next newsletter, the handover process will commence and then it's the long road home.

Until next time, stay safe at home and keep the "care packages" coming.



COMMUNICATIONS SECURITY/SAFEHAND

AL MINHAD AIR BASE

The true cowboys (and gal) of the wild, wild, sandy and bloomin' hot west

Dom Larry's wish come true...

My name is Dominic Larobina, but friends call me Dom or Larry. Larry comes from my surname. I am currently posted to 1CCS Williamtown.

At the beginning of this year I was part of the FCU-IX force prep at 1CSR Robertson Barracks Darwin, but only as a Reserve member. By the end of force prep I was notified I would not be going on deployment and returned to Williamtown to normal duties.

I was at the Williamtown Gym with the other 1CCS members when my FSGT came to ask me if I would like to go over to AMAB and could be ready to go by the following week...of course the answer was a big yes...!

Anyway, I arrived here in AMAB stepping off the plane and getting straight into the RSO&I briefs. I was keen to get into it, get to know the compound, place of work, work colleagues, etc, but since I was part of the FCU-9 in Darwin, getting to know the members was very easy...

I am part of the COMSEC/SAFEHAND team; CPL Chris Game is my supervisor. Chris has been a *piacere* (pleasure) to work for; he knows his job well and is a good mentor thus far. So far SAFEHAND has processed over 20 tonnes which is huge. (Editor's note: read on, all... well most... will be revealed). The hours of work within SAFEHAND are very funky but I am happy to be here and part of this team. The team within COMSEC/SAFEHAND incorporates SGT Juliet Lacey, CPL Greg Whiter, & LAC Dwayne Peckett; all have welcomed me and made me feel very much part of the team...

It's only been 2 weeks but I am smiling which is a good thing...



G'day,

I am CPL Chris Game, NCO Safehand AMAB. As well as working in Safehand, I'm also one of the Alternate Custodians here at AMAB.

The Safehand cell has been quite busy throughout the deployment, having processed over 20 tonnes of the stuff in the last four months, far more than FCU-8! Now I say stuff as we don't ever really know what's in it (with the exception of a few items)!

The Safehand team consisted of LAC Grant Clapton, new comer LAC Dominic Larobina, and me. Now a lot of people seem to think we have it easy in here in Safehand... but I can assure you we don't! The hours are long and random, and a lot of our work is done behind the scenes. So while others are asleep, dreaming of going back home to Australia, going to work



or even just finishing work, we're working hard putting things into action, just so we can get the job done.

It has been a great experience working with other units deployed to AMAB, such as the ALT (Air Lift Team) and JMCO (Joint Movement Coordination Office), whom we work with closely in order to get our gear into country or even back home. There's a good "scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" policy between us, where favours are always welcomed (nothing like bringing back the good old days). We always help out the ALT's whenever we can by helping them unload pallets, to help make things quicker, while we wait for our gear to come off, which in turn is always appreciated.

On a personal note, I have made some good friends over here from all services and hopefully many will still be mates in years to come.

😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊

Hi there, I'm Dwayne Peckett and I work in COMSEC as a Ledger Keeper.

Life in AMAB for me has been enjoyable, but this work is cutting into my gym life. Isn't that what deployment is about, getting huge? Work here has been pretty constant. We have had our hands full so far with this deployment. I know it's hard for you to believe, "COMSEC, they don't work, they have their private room and sleep all day": it's not all fun and games behind the curtain but we're a happy bunch. I've become a bit of a gym coach here for a few guys, note to fame is Brent Jeffrey who has put on 6kg of muscle since working out with me and if you know Brent, he's a tall lanky guy. Well that's it for me; I've got to get back to putting my feet up and sleeping.

😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊

Alrighty then, the Boss here (as Gregggy likes to call me, or is it "thou whom shall be obeyed"? Yes, that has a certain ring to it). My turn to *blah blah* about our wonderful little COMSEC (Communications Security)/Safehand section here at AMAB.

Hang on – "Wake up Dwayne, it's your turn to do the cake and coffee run...."

Okay where was I? Oh right. What is COMSEC, you ask (my Dad asks that all the time, "What do you do?") Well, we manage and coordinate all the *beep* for our little part of the world; we do that through *beep beep* and with the aid of technology. Hope that explains it a little bit better?????? As the SGT and Custodian (sounds cool doesn't it...say it again, "Custodian") of COMSEC/Safehand it is my job to even out all the testosterone floating around, a wonderfully challenging task you may appreciate, and yes, I am the only "sheila" in the AMAB CIS nodal Village.

You have heard from all the guys I work with, minus one CPL Whiter, another Alternate Custodian who helps us out with *beep beep* of the material. CPL Whiter is currently enjoying his ROCTFA with his (I believe) very patient wife, cruising around the Mediterranean.



Hopefully he is enjoying a cocktail or two as I type out this little blurb. Hurry up back, I miss delegating work to you.

Since our arrival may I say, “What a ride, what an adventure we have had”, and *generally* all whilst smiling and having a laugh. As Gamey and the new guy Lazza mentioned, they have processed a sizeable amount of Safehand throughout the MEAO and back to Oz, and all without any hiccups: a job well done. At this time it would be remiss of me not to mention a member that also assisted greatly with this movement, one LAC Grant “Clappo” Clapton, who unfortunately was unable to complete his tour with us, but his efforts were greatly appreciated during his deployment period. I also hope you are enjoying a cocktail or two for us.

At times, we had tasks where we thought “how in the hootin’ nanny” are we going to do that, but we did. The team dug deep and ran with the challenges faced; we achieved some pretty funky stuff. The RAAF has a motto, “Per Ardua Astra”, Lacey’s Interpretation: Through adversity you will reach the stars. Well, my team certainly rocked it out to that beat – kudos to you guys.

As to the families back home, we thank you for your support that allows us to continue on with our work through some trying times (and that’s just not my wonderful singing – I have an awesome finger-nails-down-a-chalkboard-like voice), so kudos to you all as well. To my other half AKA “the boy”, thanks for all the chicken chips and V8 juices, awesome lah.

Toot toot and cheers - SGT Juliet Lacey
“The only sheila in the AMAB CIS nodal village”

COMSEC/SAFEHAND COWBOYS & GAL

L to R: CPL Gregggy Whiter, LAC “new boy” Dom Larobina, CPL Chris Game, LAC Dwayne Peckett and SGT Juliet Lacey



ROCL WAR'IES

IS DETACHMENT, TARIN KOWT

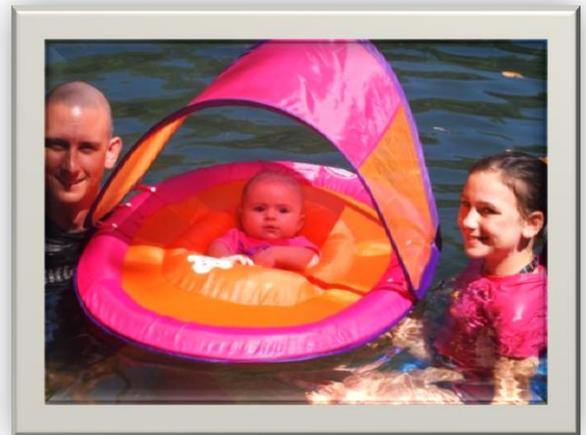
Wardy here.

We are well over half way and by the time you read this most, if not all, will have had their ROCL/ROCTFA and we will all be back on deck to finish our mission. I thought I might share some of my ROCL experiences.

While some headed back to Aus and others went globe-trotting around the world, I headed back to a surprisingly chilly Darwin. Let me explain: I had just spent three months or so in Afghanistan, then two and a bit days in AMABistan (Camp Cupcake) in which no amount of 'Angry Bears' eased the heat! I arrived in Darwin in the early hours of my 30th birthday and scrambled for a hoodie and trackies. I must have looked odd but I was freezing. That night, I fired up my new BBQ and with wife, kids, sister, brother in-law and friends, got used to the idea of being 30.

I spent my time with my wife and two daughters, the littlest you may remember from the first edition of the Star. I am pleased to report all were doing well. Mum enjoyed the break and having some backup as I traded the body armour and weapons for nappies and school runs.

The new mission objective included taking my eldest to school and picking her up, making lunches, helping with the odd science project, bottles, nappies and taking the girls swimming (first ever swim for the lil one).



Wardy at home

As some of you may have done, I found myself referring to TK as home, bit sad, but it happened at least twice!! I was talking to my wife and referring to 'when I get home', meaning my return back into theatre!

I had a fantastic time, loved every minute of it, except my dealings with MVR and our local Ford dealer, but that's a boring story for another time.....

But most of all, I saw what a wonderful job was being done back at home. The hard stuff is back there, where things carry on, kids still need bottles, help with homework, all those things, and in every one of your homes a loved one is halfway across the world serving their country and being sorely missed.



We appreciate the thoughts, love and encouragement we receive from home, and please know we are thinking of you all back in Aus: your sacrifice and commitment to crack on with the task at hand and doing us proud in regards to how you handle yourselves in anticipation of our return.

The recognition should go to the ones who support us, cover our absence and allow us to do our job.

Thank you for all that you do!
See you all back in Aus.

Signalman T.J. Ward

