

A Wren in Afghanistan

In the November 2009 edition of "Faith Matters" there was an article from a Wren Officer on her 6-month tour of duty in Iraq. Here is one from a Wren Petty Officer on her 6-month tour of duty to Afghanistan which is reproduced from the "Wren"

I have just returned from a 6 months tour in Kabul, Afghanistan working for the Deputy Commander International Security Assistance Force (DCOM ISAF) who is also the Senior British Military Representative – Afghanistan (SBMR-A) and a 3-Star Royal Marine General.

There were a couple of courses that I had to complete prior to my departure including re-acquainting myself with a gun and the Individual Pre-Deployment Training (IPDT) which was 2 weeks learning about IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices), Landmines, Vehicle drills (should you come under attack) and all other things that you might associate with being in a combat zone. I thoroughly enjoyed it even though it included 3 days running around Longmoor Camp (Army Camp in Hampshire) in December with 90 other sailors all preparing to go to Afghanistan and Iraq. Fortunately it didn't rain but it was very cold!

I departed the UK, courtesy of the RAF, on a very foggy morning from Brize Norton. The whole journey took me 3 days to get to Kabul due to the bad weather – I met up with most of the people that had been on my IPDT as they were stuck in Kandahar due to bad weather and technical problems with aircraft. It took all the Medics about 6 days to complete their journey from UK to Camp Bastion. I arrived in Kabul around midnight and was taken to the ISAF Headquarters after a security brief from the Vehicle Commander – it was at this point that it came home to roost what I had done!

My job was the Office Manager to the DCOM ISAF assisting with the day to day running of his office – the staff consisted of at Lt Col Army Military Assistant (MA), Royal Marine Major Aide de Camp (AdC), myself a Petty Officer Logistics and the Boss's Close Protection Team (6 personnel). It was 7 days a week starting at 0700 and finishing anywhere between 2000 and 2200. On Friday and Sundays we started later than usual getting a deserved lay-in unless the Boss had any diary events that required us to be in the office. ISAF

splits Afghanistan into 5 regions: Regional Command North, Regional Command East, Regional Command South, Regional Command West and Regional Command Capital. All the Regional Commands (RCs) are headed by 2-Star Generals from different NATO countries. The HQ itself has over 32 different countries represented and is headed by a 4-Star US General. During my deployment I witnessed the sudden departure of General David McKiernan and arrive of General Stanley McChrystal. Daily I would liaise with all nationalities including Afghan Government departments and all the problems that brings! It was definitely an experience! With the Boss being the SBMR-A this also meant that we were in regular contact with London and the Senior Officers in Helmand. We regularly had high level visits from the UK as well as other NATO (and non-NATO) countries. Unfortunately we also got all the information on what happened to our men and women in Helmand which reminded us of what we were sent to do.

Personally the tour could be quite monotonous with every day being very similar to the day before! Getting through the first month seemed to take forever, however facilities on the Camp were very good compared to others in the country. There was an excellent gym that opened from 0500 until 2200 every day with Physical Training Instructors providing various training classes for all. One of the presentation/meeting rooms doubled up as a cinema in the evening when a different film was played each night. There were several café/restaurants as well as the Dining Facility in case you wanted something a bit different, although the food was very good considering where we were (no Ration Packs for us). Each country also had its own National Support Element (NSE) where the UK had its own Pay Officer, Post, Signal and Stores staff. Our NSE was staffed by Army personnel and provided our little bit of England including the NAAFI and mess where we would meet for tea and toast on a Tuesday morning, quiz nights and keeping up with

the sport back in the UK courtesy of British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS).

I did manage to travel around the country with the Boss when he visited other Commands. Not long after arriving I visited the RC (East) area where we went to look at one of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT). This particular PRT was American and whilst there we visited some of their Projects including a bridge crossing and a school that teaches Afghan men bricklaying, plumbing, electrical and woodwork. Additionally the Boss was invited to meet the Governor of the Province with whom we also had lunch. It was great to get out of the capital for a couple of days and see what is a beautiful country.

At the end of my 6 month tour I left having made some good friends that I remain in contact with including Americans, Canadians and Australians. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and with more and more Naval personnel being sent to Afghanistan I would surmise that I will probably be called upon again.

Vicki Taylor

