

Feature

International postings

Trading places

L EEMING-based Gunner WO William Bruce handed over the role of Garrison Sergeant Major with 904 EAW to Honington's WO Jake Alpert as the RAF Regiment continues to transfer security duty to Afghan forces.

WO Alpert said: "It's a great privilege. Our role is of paramount importance as part of the transition."

In other postings, Wg Cdr Andy Johnstone took a bow as the first commander of the recently formed Middle East based 906 EAW. He is succeeded by Wg Cdr Andy Challen.

Wg Cdr Johnstone said: "It has been the most demanding yet most enjoyable tour of my 24 years in the Service and I thank every member of my tri-service team."

34 Sqn Gunners handed over Force Protection duties at Kandahar airfield to the Army for the first time as the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment took on the task earlier this month.

Speaking after passing on command to Capt Andy Crompton, Flt Lt 'Dot' Cotton said: "Undoubtedly the Army will now bring some unique skills to the FP world. I wish them the best of luck and a safe tour."

There has also been a change of command on the Falklands as Air Cdre Russ La Forte celebrated his birthday by taking over as commander of British Forces South Atlantic Islands from outgoing Army chief Brig Bill Aldridge. He said: "This is the biggest, the most expensive and the most important present I am likely to receive."



CHALLENGE:
WO Bruce, left,
and WO Alpert



DEBUT: Wg
Cdr Johnstone,
left, and Wg Cdr
Challen



ISLAND LIFE: Air
Cdre La Forte, right,
with Brig Aldridge



ARMY ROLE:
Flt Lt Cotton,
left, with Capt
Crompton

Up close & personnel

with Bill Mahon



The Families Federation's director shares some of their casework

ROYAL AIR FORCE Families Federation

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We represent *all* RAF families

WHY DOES the Families Federation appear to mostly focus attention and resources on those in Service Family Accommodation? What about the families who are less risk averse and take a chance and invest in their own homes?

Most SFA I drive past have expensive cars outside, flat screen TVs on the wall and the occupants enjoying lavish holidays each year, whilst my family and I have to cut our cloth accordingly and repair our own homes ie. take responsibility for our own choices. I wholly accept that some lower ranks, junior personnel and new families must have the support and security of SFA, and this must remain as a top priority, but there has to be a point when a choice to take permanent residence in SFA across a whole career becomes unacceptable.

The Families Federation is much valued by both types of mindset when it comes to the representation it provides – our voice and thank you for that, but come on Families Federation, why does your documentation, website and literature appear to be focused toward supporting those in SFA?

I'M WRITING this from my office, looking out onto the 'patch' at Wittering and admiring all the Ferraris and Aston Martins parked outside the SFA and watching sun-kissed families returning home from their lavish Easter breaks... Not. I don't think many will agree that your view of life in SFA represents the reality for the majority, but I take your point in the spirit intended!

More seriously, and as you identify, some live in SFA out of choice; many others have no choice. Either way, it is noteworthy that around 60 per cent of our casework comes from issues raised (across all ranks) specifically about SFA. Many also come to us with other issues that have arisen from some kind of SFA-related problem.

The common theme that runs through these issues is the often incredible levels of stress, angst and frustration that they cause for families. So I make no apologies for the attention we focus on SFA occupancy.

That said, a quick glance at our stats indicates that 75 per cent of those who have participated in our surveys and workshops, and 72 per cent of those family members who have raised individual concerns with us, reside in Service-provided accommodation. So we still face the challenge of how we can engage effectively with, and gather evidence from, families like yours so that we can confidently represent a balanced viewpoint from across the Service.

This is something that we work on continuously but it does depend on getting ourselves better known within the RAF Community – my number 1 priority for 2013.

I would also emphasise and, hopefully, reassure you that we are here for the whole RAF Family – serving regulars, reservists and families – regardless of the type of accommodation in which they live, and that the balance of issues we deal with cover a wide variety of topics that are nothing to do with SFA, ranging from education and childcare to financial and personnel

issues. We treat these with exactly the same degree of gravitas and attention as we do the SFA issues.

We also represent relevant topics and concerns through our surveys, workshops and visits that are open to everyone, not just the SFA population.

Our recent survey on the impact (or not) of the Armed Forces Covenant and our current survey on Pay and Allowances are just two examples and, if you take a look at our website, you'll find numerous reports and submissions we have made to the RAF Senior Leadership Team, to MoD, to the House of Commons Defence Select Committee and to AFPRB about the 'non-SFA' concerns people have.

In response to your letter, I've also asked the team to take a look at the website and our magazine, *Envoy*, and to adjust the emphasis where and when appropriate.

WE'RE IN YOUR CORNER

To contribute to our evidence, please send your views to the Federation via our website at www.raf-ff.org.uk or speak to one of the Federation team on **01780 781650**. We can then use your evidence to help influence further debates. Online surveys on a number of topics are also available on the RAF FF website. Please add your voice