S05064 Interview with Corporal Sandi Rixxon, Tarin Kot 2011
Duration 33.32
Rough transcription

I'm a mechanic, at home in Australia I'm at 2nd Cav Rgmnt, mounted in the ASLAVs. At home I work mostly on ASLAV's. Over here I'm working on bushmasters and ASLAVs which are the two vehicles over here.

I didn't have any quals before I joined. I did the recruit training at Kapooka , went down to Albury Wodonga trade school,.. where u come out as a heavy diesel qualified mechanic. From there you do another 12 months at trade school, its very clean.. then on the job training.. I got to go on mines, CSIRO boats, big boats Darwin, exposure to things when you wouldn't in the Army..
2.16 yeh I been pretty lucky with my postings.

2.32 My first real posting was to Combat Engineers at Darwin.. before going to 2 CAV and getting Bushmasters and ASLAVs

[special training to work on Bushmaster?]
03.08 for each vehicle - not your normal land rovers and Unimogs and macs, you're qualified to work on those as soon as you're out of trade school, but for anything further than that, your armoured vehicles, broken down into variables, the tanks , APCs, ASLAVs and that they 're specialty courses you've got to go an do.

03.40 Bushmasters maintenance wise are very good vehicle to work on, as well as, they've spoken for themselves, with protective, uh, protective capabilities for soldiers. They're an excellent piece kit…

[made / designed in Australia weren't they?]
I believe they were tested down in Puckapunyal. They done a lot of testing. And I believe the Dutch have now bought them, or the British.. So its good, now finally - instead of us buying stuff off other countries, they're buying them off us. It's a pretty good, turn.
Yeah I couldn't talk a lot about the background,

04.27 I just know it was an Australian project, they're excellent. They're a good car.

[have you driven a Bushmaster?]
04.40 We go on test drives, I haven't done a drivers' course, to drive it specifically, that's another course you got to do but. . we do test drives after we worked on it, make sure its all good again, so it can go back out.

05.00 The guys [the Cav guys] have their personal kit in there, the rule is if the car's in the workshop, so's the crew. There's a lot of tasks they can do in there was well. And their stuff They've got their kit,.. its mainly the crew that's responsible for the security of that.

[have you worked on a damaged Bushmaster?]
05.50 We got approval to repair one that was an IED strike, the IED went off beside the vehicle, that was before our trip. When we got here the inspections and everything had been done, we got approval to do the repairs,.. it was mainly superficial damage, the windows and that - that vehicles back in service now.

06.205 I'm based here in Tarin Kot. Our combat teams do have a mechanics and an armourer out there with them, at their bases, they do the main work on them, we do any major repairs that can't be done out there in the patrol bases..

[why did you join the Army?]
07.00 I was 19, basically finished school, I was on the Sunshine Coast.. I knew I wanted to join the Army or the Police Force. I finished, just had a year off just working, and playing footy. .when I looked at joining either, the police force had a few more requirements, would have had to wait a few years. So I just decided to join the army instead!

[why did you choose to be a mechanic?]
07.41 I don't know, I was always interested in how things worked. My nan tells stories of when I was sitting on the bonnet, of when my dad was working on the car, .. It was excellent to do an apprenticeship through the Army; just the pay and the way it was run, so much better than doing it thru the Tafe, definitely recommend it , if someone was going to do it for the apprenticeship, join the Army.

[friends here with you?]
08.40 Recovery guys, I don't think he came over .. we did recruit training together. You quite often see people you did training with. There was a guy here who was on my course.. most of my guys got mechanics,. Guys that were on your course or other trades there at the same time as you so you're forever bumping into people you know.. degrees of separation here are three (not six)

09.45 no matter where you go you'll find someone you're good mates with.

10.10 I don't mind it. I actually don't mind it, the guys gossip more than the girls, its pretty funny. Iv 'e never had any dramas with it at all, I quite like it.

10.28 I haven't worked a lot with other females, being in my role, and being always posted to combat units. Um, they've just, in the past few years, six seen years, started putting femakles into combat units, obviously not combat roles, but combat units, support staff and stuff like that..

10.40 ... when I first got to CR there were no other women, by time I left there were two female mechanics. There's a few.. spread out through Australia.

[accommodation] – we've got a room of eight

11.40 The rooms we're in are the doubles, it's a double shipping container, .. We're very lucky we get along very well, very good dynamics in the room, there's been no dramas whatsoever. Storage space – everything just gets put in the trunk or under the bed or whatever - a lot of us keep the body armour in the works space , sort of a thing. you just try to minimise whatever's in the room.. ready to go at any time.

12.30 [in the share accommodation] We got a truck driver, a Q Store Sergeant, couple clerks, a medical staff and myself.

12.48 [combat roles - how do people feel about the latest change to army policy– any sense of women wanting to go into a combat role?]

12.56 Not in my experience, no, and I don't want to. I love being in a role to support that [combat role]. In Australia at both my units, I've been, in, not in a combat role, but I've been in a role where I've been in the back of a n ASLAV, of an APC, in a first track [sic?] Rolling with the Engineers or rolling with the Cav. Over here, being female, I'm not allowed to do that here for obvious reasons but.

13.35 No, its. I fully understand the dynamics , I've never been a one to campaign for women on the front line, and I never will . I ah, definitely understand the dynamics of why we're not there. No, its not for everyone !

[what's life like on the base]
14.15 We do – your day to day, you get into a bit of a routine. Go to breakfast, go the gym, the gym's an excellent bit of time out. At the stables, the work varies, anything can happen. Yeah. There's just - Work dumped on your lap at the last minute that you don't know anything about, like a combat team's come in, you come back from dinner and there's three cars sitting there and you go – Ah ! Wev 'e pulled some late nights up there, cos its just something that, if the cars have to be gone the next day, we've got to work through the night to get that done.

15.12 When there is quiet time, you enjoy that, just clean the place up and just chill.. but its pretty constant up there, with armoured vehicles.
15.24 the work is constant and just varies in tempo.

15.40 Not a lot .. not workwise. Down at the main work shop, they' got the American workshop straight opposite. So I know there's alot of back and forth between them, borrowing stuff and using stuff but up at the stables we don't have a lot personally – I've worked with an ?? team out on patrol.. but we do have3 a social life here, everyone tends to blend fairly well.

1636 everyone's easy to get along with, .. pretty relaxed open minded.

[Unisex toilets, different cultures]
17.00 When we were in the lines up here, I think the guys loved it especially with the Dutch, the Dutch are so free, .. I've heard plenty of stories of the guys walking in with the Dutch females, they're pretty liberal. When we first got there , they had a sunbathing bay, just over there – oh yeah, they were in swimmers..

[Have you caught the gastro or anything?]
18.00 No fortunately I haven't been ill at all. Flu's the biggest one going round at the moment. We moved into new accommodation for the Australians, we haven't had any issues up there, touch wood. I know down here, the Coalition toilets everyone using, it breaks out a bit. Everyone knows to wash their hands lots.

19.00 [how do you feel about being under threat of rocket attack]
19.35 My two mates came back with picture of themselves in the bunker with the band, "1927".. I was joking with my partner.. If we don't aught about it , then you think gee – we had a few close calls .. and they're definitely getting closer.

20.10 When we first got here -.. sailed just over a box of broken parts waiting to go to back to Australia – went right past it and fragged a brand new axle !!! What are the chances. Missed the broken stuff and hit the brand new stuff.

21.00 Holiday – Rome – not going scuba diving in Egypt after all, just as well given what's happening there.

22.13 She was born in Townsville, her dad was in Defence about 38 years. .. when I was in trade school.. I played football.. she was in the opposite team, we didn't really like each other.. ended up on same team – became friends

23.12 Yeah – been away, like between courses and obvs this deployment – we had our 3 year anniversary four months ago - - it doesn't get any easier. Its good that she understands. Obvs with her father being in the army so long, helps her understand.. still sucks but. Its still ok.

25.37 if I get the opportunity to come back, I'll definitely take it but as for the near future. Get home, have some respite. Maybe posted to Brisbane. Then on to the next thing !

26.20 Yeah – the first time I went to the War Memorial was when we do recruits, they take us up to the Memorial – and the other time, was I played Army Football and we went there with RMC, .. went thru the War Memorial as a bit of a team building exercise..

27.38 I love what I do. Something different every day, especially here, such an eye opening experience, working with Coalition Forces. I done a mission tying to work with local females. They stated, were very successful in Iraq. .. called Female Engagement Team- stated here – got to hospitals, go to schools. Basically find out from the females, what is needed in the area – water, schools. Ask, what would let the girls go to school? All they cared about was home economics, being able to cook – learning to read was just a bonus. Sending sewing machines to the school so the girls would get to go to school..

29.15 It was a voluntary thing, when we got here. We did a lot of extra training, learning a bit of Pashto.. further training, cos different forces, different, various levels before they come into country.

30.34 the other girls had pretty successful missions, .. unfortunately with mine, it wasn't a nice area. .. it was just, the activities that had been going on in that area, still a bit of a Taliban stronghold. The Australians had done.. a very successful clearance operation thru there, we followed it up.. we had an older man come up to us and said, 'We want to talk to you, but we can't'.
We didn't want to cause any trouble so we moved on.. Letting us in to talk to the people, they weren't very open to it. But it takes a bit of time, to make it work.. in other areas, you can walk in, no body armour, the women taken their burquas off, it's a different story.

32.11 behind closed doors, the women rule the roost.. but trying to get in behind those closed doors, takes a lot of time.

32.45 It is, its , I thought it was an excellent opportunity to do something different outside of my primary role, and towards the bigger picture as well – it's a great opportunity.