

The Mess staff did an outstanding job, Sergeant Jones in his frock and Private Street in his wig managed to serve a lovely meal and pleasant wine. The 4RAR Association members enjoyed an entertaining evening, and the ladies enjoyed hearing from retired RSM ARMY, Warrant Officer Wally Thompson who expressed admiration and pride in the resilience of the Army wife. We toasted the appropriate people and regiments and even managed to maintain the upstanding position long enough to raise our glasses to our men. The evening was a great success but like all good evenings there is a tale of honour and glory to be told, for in our midst there were a group of villains.

Some young soldiers from another Battalion were in Sydney on course and against better judgement decided to leave their RSM snoozing and enjoy a cleansing ale or ten. On their journey home they stumbled upon our gathering. And there the trouble began. When their kind offer to *be* the entertainment for the ladies was refused and they were sent upon their way, they decided to take up position in the foliage behind the Mess. The five men present (two in dresses, three in mess kit) spotted the offenders and gave chase down the hill, over the road and into the bushland surrounding the range. Under cover of darkness a game of cat-and-mouse ensued. No match for the wits of Major Berry, Captains Tidswell and Whitelaw, Sergeant Jones and Private Street, two were collared and taken in for questioning. Captain Tidswell established that you *could*, in fact, swim through a creek in a mess kit and find a mobile phone in bushland in the middle of the night without the assistance of night-vision goggles.

Having been woken from his slumber, their RSM was none too pleased to find his soldiers soaking wet and locked up in the 4RAR duty room. Needless to say the thought of going AWOL for a few beers will seem far less attractive when they do eventually get off the parade ground.

September brought with it one of the toughest hurdles we faced, Father's Day. To keep us busy there was a BBQ at the Waratah Centre. The social committee had organised yet another fabulous day with a jumping castle, clowns and face-painting for the kids and a BBQ for all.

*"Since we're being the mum and the dad, ladies, don't forget to get yourselves a Father's Day present!" Marilyn*

The day attracted visits from the media and was televised on the evening news. It was nice to receive recognition from the media, since the crisis in Timor stabilised the media coverage had dwindled which was difficult for the families and the men.

*"The hardest thing is when you tell people your husband is in Timor and they look blank and say 'are we still over there?' It doesn't seem fair that our men are working so hard and risking their lives and the media doesn't care because it's not full-scale war."*

The Kids Disco was a hit and was scheduled for a second appearance in the social calendar. A craft day to create gifts for Dads was also a huge success. The Social Committee focussed heavily on creating events to entertain the children and they did an outstanding job. Lots of children used the opportunities for creativity to be closer to their Dads by drawing pictures, writing poems and making gifts to send to Timor.

### ***I Miss You Daddy***

*My Daddy is so far away  
I miss him every single day  
When he comes home I'll hug him tight  
I'll never let him out of sight  
For it's been a long six months in all  
We haven't kicked a single ball*

*No beach, no park, no time for play  
Nor listening to the things he'd say  
When into bed I go at night  
Just before I turn off my light  
I kiss his face on my bedroom wall  
Not long to go I hear him call  
I miss you Daddy*

*Akira (♡Mummy)*

The welcome home Banner was another successful idea that the social committee came up with. Covered in lipstick kisses and hand prints it represented all of us at home who literally counted days and nights until our men came home smelling of gun oil and dirt. It's amazing how much you miss that smell, unique to Army men and normally treated with disdain when they stumble in the door and dump their weeks of dirty laundry at your feet.

*"At five o'clock I get anxious, it's like I'm waiting for him to walk through the door but my mind doesn't compute that it isn't going to happen."*

In the last few weeks the excitement was mixed with many anxieties. We had changed. We were tougher, independent and busy. We had built lives for ourselves and we didn't know how it was all going to fit back together again. We worried what the future held and we knew our friendships would change as people posted out and our lives became filled with family commitments. We worried that our husbands wouldn't appreciate the changes we had made. We worried the kids wouldn't recognise their father.

*"Him being away was hard. But him coming home was harder. He used to follow me into the toilet. It's suffocating. He kept saying I'd changed. He seemed unhappy about it, and I wondered; what did he expect?"*

As this chapter concludes, so too does a chapter in the lives of four hundred ordinary women who held the fort while their husbands did their duty in East Timor. It may not be the greatest challenge we will ever face but it certainly was a year to remember.

***Our Brave Soldiers***

*Seasons have changed,  
Children have grown,  
Birthdays came and went,  
And for most the world went on,*

*But not for us.  
Without our men,  
Time stood still.  
No boots at the door,  
No hats in the hall.*

*We held the fort, we did our best,  
We shared moments of sorrow and moments of pride,  
We learned strength and determination,  
We laughed and we cried,  
But mostly we just missed you,*

*Our brave soldiers.*

*We watched in wonder as you did our nation proud,  
You worked so hard, in the heat and in the rain,  
You maintained your vigilance,  
You did your job with honour and with courage.*

*Our brave soldiers.*

*You were part of an historic moment,  
You nurtured a precious freedom,  
You supported a budding democracy,  
You inspired the human spirit.*

*Our brave soldiers,  
Who shrug and smile,  
'Just doing my job', you say.  
Maybe so,  
But stand tall and be proud,  
You are the heroes of a lucky country.*

*You are our brave soldiers,  
And we welcome you home,  
We honour your achievements,  
And we rejoice in this journey's end.*

*Katherine Mathews.*



*Partners enjoying their cross-dressed dining in night during the deployment.  
A successful event enjoyed by all.*