

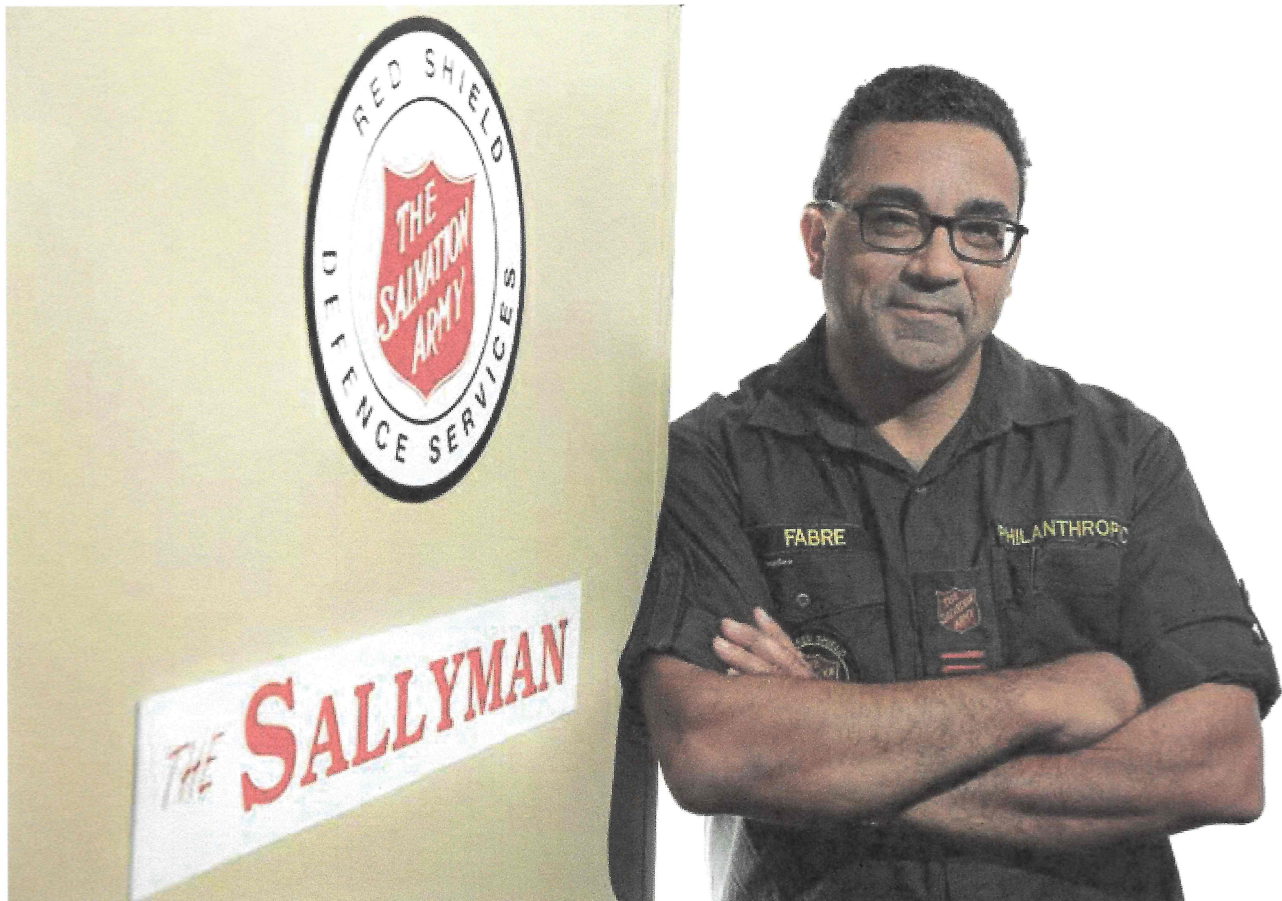
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Ministry of presence on the front line.

Anzac Day will take on even greater significance this year for Captain Lyndley Fabre, Chief Commissioner of The Salvation Army Red Shield Defence Services (RSDS). Captain Fabre will later this month bring to an end a four-month deployment with Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel at Camp Baird – Australia's main logistics base in the Middle East region.

On Anzac Day, we stop to remember Australians killed in war, honour returned servicemen and women, and support those on active duty. Captain Fabre, the first Australian philanthropic support representative to deploy to the Middle East region since World War Two, spoke to *Pipeline* writer **SIMONE WORTHING** about his deployment.

TOP RIGHT: Captain Fabre at his office door which clearly states his role at Camp Baird.



Simone: You have spent the past four months at Camp Baird. Can you describe what it has been like?

Captain Fabre: I arrived at Camp Baird two weeks prior to Christmas, and it was the first time I had been away from my family over a Christmas period. I found that to be extremely challenging and difficult. However, everyone here faced the same situation and we were able to take comfort in that together. This in itself proved to be a positive as it helped me to establish trusting relationships and important networks. This was a case of a painful situation being turned into good. As things became familiar and a routine established, I was able to settle into my role of the Sallyman on base. Sometimes it can feel very much like "groundhog day" as the routine is the same seven days a week. Each day of the week becomes harder to recall and you almost feel like you are on auto-pilot. We live in a fairly small compound for the approximately 500 personnel deployed here, so you are pretty much around people all the time unless you are in your room. The challenge for me, as an introvert, has been to make sure I find time to myself in order to recharge. Time has gone quickly for me though, as I keep myself active and busy engaging with the folks here. There are some colourful characters based here and it is never boring or dull.

S: What does it mean to be a "philanthropic representative"?

CF: A philanthropic representative is primarily involved

in the provision of welfare and well-being support to all personnel. We are tasked with providing moral support to the troops. It's not much different to other chaplaincy-based ministries, other than we do it in a unique environment which is the ADF. The role involves primarily a listening ear for those who have issues going on in their lives and/or grievances with their deployment. However, the hard work is in establishing the relationship which will encourage people to trust you enough that they will share their troubles and challenges with you. This takes time and patience, but also persistence in a non-confronting way. I also engage with people about their faith journeys or lack of one, depending on where they are at. The "philanthropic" is a jack-of-all-trades who is prepared to get in and get their hands dirty if need be.

S: Why did the ADF decide to deploy you, and other representatives, at this particular time?

CF: The RSDS has worked very hard over many years to deploy personnel to the Middle East in support of our troops. I know my predecessor, Major Barry Nancarrow, tried extremely hard to have RSDS reps deployed but unfortunately to no avail. In late 2015, I decided to write directly to the new Chief of Defence Force (CDF) to put my case forward as to why we should be considered for deployment. The CDF wrote back to me straight away and asked to meet with me. I travelled to Canberra and, with our Salvation Army National Secretary, met with the CDF. ►

I was under the assumption that I was there to put a case forward, but the CDF had already decided he wanted us there and that he wanted us deployed prior to Christmas. This was October! He shared the story that he had been on a major exercise recently where he came across a Sallyman in the field and he was really impressed with what he observed. He then received my email when he got back to his office and it went from there. The ADF has allotted significant resources in caring for and helping troops deal with mental health issues. I believe the CDF acknowledges our role within that context.

S: What are some of the challenges you've faced during deployment?

CF: The initial challenge was that our work here was a "start-up". I wasn't following anyone in, which meant that I had to establish the work here from scratch and find our place and where we fit. That involved observation and plenty of questions and chats with relevant personnel. I had to be very mindful of not treading on toes, in particular the padres! As a result, we have been tasked to provide manning and support in the recreation centre, where I have office space to work from. We also provide our traditional support with the brew truck, to a small arms range at the back of Camp Baird. The challenge here though, is that I did not have a vehicle. The process was put in place to procure a vehicle and all the necessary equipment required to provide basic catering facilities at the range. Another major challenge, which I think will test even the best of us, is that RSDS ministry at Camp Baird does not revolve around the services of the truck and providing brews, but rather being a person who is available to interact and support personnel away from the truck. It is very much a "presence" ministry.

S: What have been some of the rewards and positive experiences of being on deployment?

CF: The rewards are plenty: To share in an experience that few people or (Salvation Army) officers would have the opportunity to; to learn of a new culture and the people who make up that culture; to meet some incredible ADF personnel who give sacrificially of their time and service and I am blessed because of it; to share in people's journeys who face unique challenges of being deployed for considerable lengths of time away from home, family and friends; to be a friend to those who need it most during this time; to have the opportunity to develop lasting relationships beyond my time here; and to share the gospel message of hope and freedom in Jesus to those who seek after it. I've also had the opportunity to meet folks I would not normally meet, like the Prime Minister on his recent visit here. I've also had the opportunity to meet with parliamentarians and senators as they visit and I was privileged to get to know their stories in a one-on-one situation. I'm hoping that the prospect of deploying like I have, and others those in my department

will do in the coming months and years, will be a "selling point" to those (Salvation Army) officers out there who would like to try something different.

S: The Air Force and Navy are new to the role of the Sallyman. How have you been able to familiarise them with that work, and what relationships have you been able to form?

CF: This was definitely a challenge! Camp Baird is an air base and, as such, a significant proportion of personnel here are Air Force, with a sprinkling of Navy and Army folks as well. The Air Force and Navy, as you say, are not familiar with our role as we predominantly work with Army units back home. I had to set out to show that although back home we do work predominantly with Army units, we don't play favourites between the services and that we are available to all service personnel. The chaplains were a great help here and I thank them for their support as they fast-tracked my introduction by organising key meetings with senior leadership on base. The rest was up to me! I began by attending as many social functions that were on offer as I could, and I still make a point to do this. I did this in uniform so people would see me and begin to familiarise themselves with my role. It worked. I engaged with people, which led to questions about myself and my role and what it is I do. As they noticed me around more and more, they grew accustomed to seeing me and I began to feel included and appreciated, and told as much! It has been very humbling. There is still more work to do here and it is a constant challenge because personnel come and go, and we can't afford to rest on our past achievements. The good thing is though, as the exiting personnel depart they introduce their replacement to me in a positive way which helps establish that new relationship.

S: Overall, how do you think the men and women of the ADF have responded to your work?

CF: They consider it with high regard and value. I think there has been a clear recognition from the CDF that our role is valuable and we do value-add in a deployed environment. We must ensure, however, that our deployed (RSDS) personnel maintain that at the highest level.

S: How do you think this deployment has added to the relationship between the ADF and The Salvation Army?

CF: It is a huge development which cannot be underestimated. The RSDS has always been a deployable department – we advertise it in our mission statement – so to not deploy in recent times I believe has damaged our credibility slightly in the eyes of the troops, even though it was not our doing and beyond our control. It has reinstated a very special bond that The Salvation Army has with ADF personnel; it indicates that we are true to our word; and it shows that we value them and their well-being, whether it's in Australia or some foreign land. It



01

also reinforces the ADF's confidence in us that what we, the RSDS, have to offer is important and it does make a difference for the better.

S: Will other RSDS representatives be deployed in the near future and if so, when and for what purpose?

CF: Yes, that's the plan. The deployment is currently in partnership with the Everyman's organisation, which is a similar organisation to ours within the ADF environment. The idea is that we will complete four-monthly rotation cycles where each organisation will provide a representative to complete their designated rotation. We plan to be here for the long term and for however long we need to be here. When I complete my rotation in April, I will be followed in by an Everyman's representative. Following him in August will be Lieutenant Jon Belmonte, an RSDS Representative from the Australia Eastern Territory currently serving in Robertson Barracks, outside Darwin. The RSDS is seeing-in a new era where officers, if they so choose, can be considered for deployment. I would like to encourage those officers out there who would like to experience the challenges and blessings of a deployed life to give serious consideration to joining our department. We are after dedicated and committed officers who are prepared to put the needs of ADF personnel before their own. We serve in a unique environment and one that is dynamic and richly blessed. ¶



02

01. Captain Fabre (far left) joins military personnel in conversation with Malcolm Turnbull (third from left) during the Prime Minister's recent visit to Camp Baird.
02. Captain Fabre (left) talks with Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Iain Carty, CDF (centre) and Chief of Defence Force Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin at Camp Baird in the Middle East. Air Chief Marshal Binskin was instrumental in getting an RSDS representative to deploy to the base.