

Tears and relief as RAF squadron

Services: 150 brave service personnel make emotional return to Lossiemouth

BY KAYE NICOLSON

Brave servicemen and women have made an emotional return to RAF Lossiemouth after a gruelling six-month tour in Afghanistan.

The 150 personnel of 5 Force Protection Wing – made up of 51 Squadron RAF Regiment and 2622 (Highland) Squadron Aux-

iliary Regiment – flew back to their home base just after midnight yesterday.

Despite the late hour, crowds of tearful families – with many children in pyjamas – embraced their loved ones outside RAF Lossiemouth's Grey Douglas suite.

As they stepped off the flight into the frosty night air, they were greeted by a

piper, RAF Lossiemouth's station commander Group Captain Ian Gale, and Major General Seymour Monro, honorary air commodore of 2622 (Highland) Squadron.

They had coped with various challenges, including protecting the main base at Camp Bastion, supporting medical emergencies and several clashes with insur-

gents. 5 Force Protection Wing – also made up of personnel from RAF Police, 16 Regiment Royal Artillery and the Tongan Defence Force – was involved in a deadly battle against the Taliban just last month.

Gunnery from 51 Squadron RAF Regiment battled for four hours alongside US Marines to regain control of Camp Bastion after it was stormed by heavily-armed insurgents. Together they killed 14 of the 15 enemy fighters, who had smashed through a perimeter wall, shooting dead US Marines, and wrecking aircraft, vehicles and buildings. One sergeant, Roy "Doc" Geddes, was wounded by a grenade, while others suffered minor injuries.

Wing Commander Tony Brown, officer commanding 5 FP Wing, said the tour had been remarkably rewarding. He added: "The guys and girls did an amazing job. I am extremely proud of the way all of the wing performed the night



HOME: Cpl Colin Murray and partner Suzanne Gray. Photographs: Kami Thomson

"Caught in the emotion of them coming home"

Huntly man swapped shopping bags for rifles

of September 14, in what were very difficult circumstances."

Meanwhile, Gp Cpt Gale said: "I am absolutely over the moon. Just seeing everyone get home fine, and taking a whiff of fresh Scottish air was fantastic.

"They've had a hard time, they've been away for a long time and you get caught up in emotion seeing these people come home as they have been very sorely missed. They will be looking forward to Christmas at home.

"When you look at their six-month tour, you've got daily heroism. They took part in almost 200 medical emergency response missions and that means there are a large number of lives which have been saved by people who have been thrust into the most challenging situations, landing in landing zones under fire, extracting casualties, helping medics carry out medical procedures, risk every day of the week.

"They've got quite a job in controlling the base, defending the base, going outside to wider Afghanistan to engage with locals, and of course defending the flight paths in and out of Camp Bastion, so a really important job."

Back on civvy street, Corporal Colin "Minty" Murray is an Asda delivery driver.

But despite swapping shopping bags for rifles, the 29-year-old Huntly man took his first tour to Afghanistan in his stride.

Cpl Murray, who has also served in Iraq twice, said it was great to be back on home turf yesterday.

He said: "It's good to be back, it felt good to step off the plane back home.

"The weird thing was it didn't feel cold, but the whisky certainly helped that. I'm sure the cold will hit me soon.

"Bits of the tour dragged

but other bits have gone by really quickly."

Cpl Murray, a member of 2622 (Highland) Squadron, had to provide top cover for 51 Squadron.

Among his varied roles, he scanned the roadside for IEDs and other hazards, and took turns on watch in the desert at night when the squadron protects aircraft taking off and landing at Camp Bastion.

He described his six months in Afghanistan as "a bit of an eye-opener".

For Cpl Murray, his outstanding memory was supporting medics in the helicopters.

He said: "Helping out in the helicopters with the casualties was one of those jobs which you love to hate.

"It's a brilliant job but at the same time, somebody's been hurt. It's a catch 22.

"That really sticks in my mind as something I really enjoyed doing – helping people out."

Now he is home, Cpl Murray is excited about having some downtime. As with his colleagues, he will now enjoy a welcome period of leave. But after he celebrates the festive season, he will be back in his familiar Asda van.



Families are looking forward to some downtime after a gruelling tour

flies home to family life

base after gruelling six-month tour in Afghanistan war zone



WELCOME BACK: Members of 5 Force Protection Wing are reunited with their families after a six-month tour in Afghanistan

Adam returns to see baby son for first time

BY KAYE NICOLSON

For Senior Aircraftman Adam Burrows, yesterday's return was particularly poignant.

His 20-year-old girlfriend Michelle Ewan, of Elgin, gave birth to their son Ethan just two weeks ago – so SAC Burrows was delighted to meet the new arrival for the first time.

He said: "I'm absolutely over the moon. It was a

"It was a completely new experience being in Afghanistan"

long few months. I'm looking forward to getting to know him now.

"The tour itself was interesting. I was more worried about Michelle more than anything else, but she did well."

Meanwhile, Corporal Kerri Fulbrook, 35, and her boyfriend Tam Connolly are looking forward to spending some long-awaited time together.

Both are in the RAF and only had two days between Tam returning from

Kandahar region, and Cpl Fulbrook heading out to Camp Bastion in Helmand.

She said yesterday: "The tour went really quite quickly.

"All of it really stood out for me. It was a completely new experience being in Afghanistan."

The Lossiemouth-based couple are now looking forward to taking a relaxing holiday in the Caribbean.

Meanwhile, Corporal Laurence Morgan, a reservist who works as a self-employed joiner in Perth when he is not deployed or training with the RAF, said his highlight was meeting

with the Afghan people. His son Ross has followed in his footsteps, having also recently joined the reservists.

He said: "I joined when he was born – I didn't think he would ever be in the squadron with me.

"I'm looking forward to getting back into civvy life,

seeing how the economy is and if I can start chapping nails again."

Cpl Morgan even managed to keep on top of his joinery skills while in Afghanistan – by making tables, toilets for the backs of patrol wagons, and even an ironing board for the Tongan Defence Force.



Cpl Kerri Fulbrook with fiance Tam Connolly



Service personnel disembark from a Voyager aircraft



Wing Commander Tony Brown with wife Donna and children Lorna, in his arms, Carrie, left, and Duncan



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