

The USAF/RAAF exchange rotation

Lieutenant Colonel Paula A Corrigan, USAF, MC, SFS

THE EXCHANGE OF USAF FLIGHT SURGEONS and RAAF aviation medical officers began in 1969, and in July 2001 I was the 16th USAF member (and first female) to travel “down under” for a 3-year tour. My position at Campbell Park Offices, Canberra, is an aviation medicine policy development and consultant position (ie, staff job). However, I have also had the opportunity to fly with RAAF squadrons, deploy as part of a United Nations mission, teach Army medics and practise clinical aviation medicine at the Canberra Area Medical Unit.

Once I overcame the sheer excitement of living in such a vast, beautiful country, and began to speak “Aussie” rather than “American”, I quickly came to the conclusion that this job was going to be one of the most challenging of my career. I had not realised how much we take for granted all of the abbreviations, acronyms and technical jargon that is a part of day-to-day military life, and is unique to each country. On top of this, the overall difference in size, structure, and some aspects of doctrine between US and Australian defence forces made it difficult to directly transfer knowledge and procedures from my old job to the new one.

However, despite the difficulty associated with sorting out all the differences and familiarising myself with ADF procedures, I began to realise that through this process I was starting to think “outside the box” which I had been operating in throughout my USAF career. As sceptical ADF coworkers asked me, “Why does the USAF do things that way?”, I began to comprehend that there was not always an obvious rational reason for many of the processes I had taken as standard operating procedure in the past.

Conversely, my fresh perspective on some ADF norms sometimes suggested better ways to do things here. I believe this ability to start viewing things outside the square is one of the most valuable lessons I have learned during this assignment. Approaching other countries’ operations with open-mindedness and eagerness to learn will undoubtedly be helpful in the joint operations in which I may participate in the future.

The second major benefit of my exchange tour in Australia has been meeting so many diverse and talented people. It has



First RAAF medical exchange officer (Air Vice Marshal Eric Stephenson) with current USAF medical exchange officer (Lieutenant Colonel Paula Corrigan), shown holding a list of all exchange officers to date.

RAAF/USAF Medical Exchange Officers

RAAF	Year	USAF	Year
GPCAPT Eric H Stephensen	1969-71	Col Robert R Burwell	1969-71
WGCDR Donald A Smyth	1971-73	LtCol Roy L DeHart	1971-73
SQNLDR Graeme D Moller	1973-76	LtCol Edward F Kramer	1973-75
WGCDR G William Reed	1975-77	LtCol Dale E Cloyd	1975-77
WGCDR Michael D Miller	1977-79	LtCol J Edward Fox, Jr	1977-79
WGCDR Peter S Wilkins	1979-81	LtCol John Wurmstein	1979-81
WGCDR David P Senior	1981-83	Maj Terrence Holmes	1981-83
WGCDR Paul H Shumack	1983-85	LtCol Leon Bloodworth	1983-85
WGCDR Maxwell P Hubble	1985-87	LtCol Joseph J Contiguglia	1985-87
WGCDR Graeme R Peel	1987-90	Col D Gene Claflyn	1987-90
WGCDR David L Emonson	1990-93	LtCol Michael R Mork	1990-92
WGCDR Tony K Austin	1993-95	LtCol Robert G Zerull	1992-94
WGCDR James A Ross	1995-97	Maj Emmet P Murphy	1994-96
WGCDR Peter J Clarke	1997-99	LtCol Rolland R Reynolds	1996-99
WGCDR Tracy L Smart	1999-01	LtCol Jay A Clemens	1999-01
SQNLDR Pedita Rowe	2001-04	LtCol Paula A Corrigan	2001-04

Lieutenant Colonel Paula A Corrigan is the current USAF/RAAF exchange flight surgeon, serving as SO1AVMEDPOL at the Defence Health Service Branch in Canberra since July 2001. She has completed the USAF Residency in Aerospace Medicine, as well as a residency in Internal Medicine. She is Board certified in Aerospace Medicine, General Preventive Medicine, Tropical Medicine and Internal Medicine. Her next assignment will be as Aeromedical-Dental Operations Squadron commander at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, home of USAF F-15 and F-22 training, starting in June 2004.

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been rewarding to be able to make connections between US and Australian military personnel. It is sometimes difficult to measure the “ripple” effect that follows liaison between service members of different countries. However, by simple exchange of email addresses or introductions at a conference, the resultant flow of information can be considerable. The reinvention of the wheel has been avoided many times just by asking how a similar situation is handled in different nations.

Communication is the key to excellence, and by bridging the communication gap between countries, technology as well as interoperability is enhanced. From this perspective, the military exchange program is invaluable. The exchange of information,

ideas, philosophy and goodwill that I have experienced as part of my assignment with the ADF has been excellent, and has made my tour here one of the highlights of my career. That, and the discovery of Tim Tams!

If you have any questions concerning the USAF/RAAF medical officer exchange program, feel free to contact me at (02) 6266 3917 or paula.corrigan@defence.gov.au. Also, please come by for a chat and a brew anytime at CP2-7-062, Campbell Park Offices, Canberra. A special thanks to all of my colleagues at the Directorate of Clinical Policy, who have welcomed me with warmth and hospitality during my tour in Australia. Cheers! □
