

Letter from the Desert

News from Alan & Grace

June 2005

Welcome home John Paul Alan



On June 2, John Paul Alan left hospital and came home.

Weighing in at only 2.12kg/4.66lbs., this was, of course, a major step forward in the little guy's life after more than three weeks in hospital.

Welcome home Little John!

Thanks



We would like to express our thanks to all those who have been so kind, generous and supportive during the last few weeks. We have been so touched by the gifts, flowers, cards and letters that we have received as well as the numerous visits that friends have made to the hospital and to our home. We thank you all. We especially thank God for saving the lives of both these dear people, Grace and John Paul Alan and keeping them safe through the difficult times they both endured.





The last few weeks have been very busy, but Alan took some leave and we're now up-to-date with all of the paperwork John needs. He now has three different birth certificates (Qatari, British and Filipino), two passports (dual-citizenship - British and Filipino) and residency in Qatar! What more could a guy of one month old ask for? He's costing us a fortune already!

We're already taking him out and about - and getting him used to Alan's unique style of driving! So far he's been on a couple of shopping trips to the CityCentre Mall, the Philippine Embassy and lunch at the Golf Club. He's taken everything in his stride - really enjoying the steak and kidney pie at the Golf Club!

It lovely to see Grace doing so well after the trauma she's been through recently. She's pretty much back to normal (whatever that is), and is relishing her new role as mother.

As we mentioned in the last newsletter, we were sad to see Joseph leave Qatar for pastures new - he tells us he's NOT going to retire. Here are a few photographs of some of the farewell parties held for Joseph. Also are some pictures of Ivan, Diane and Barbara who have also said goodbye to Qatar - although we suspect that Ivan will be returning.



Barbara, Diane, Grace, Vonnie



Ivan, Grace, Chris

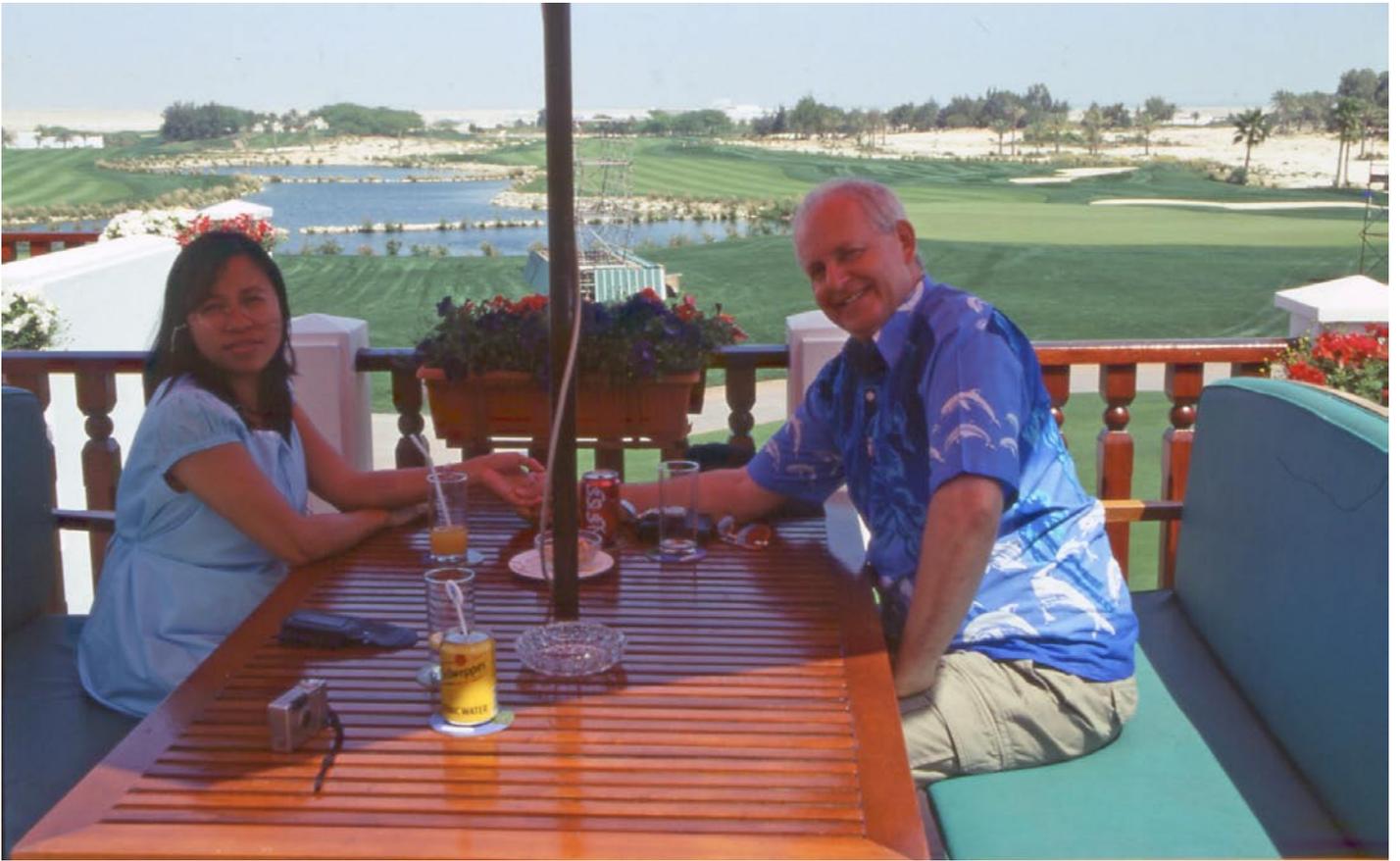


Grace, Vonnie, Joseph, Annette, Judith



Grace, Milagros, Carla, Shane Joseph, Barbara, Vonnie





Grace and Alan

Doha Golf Club



John, our friend, and Grace



The rugby team of the Royal Marines during their South African Tour 2005.



With Table Mountain in the background, Paul is on the back row, 5th from the left.

Basic Operation Sea Training on HMS Ocean

On Friday 6th May 42 Commando Group embarked on HMS Ocean to play their part in the ship's Basic Operation Sea Training (BOST). The ship had been undergoing this gruelling training for the previous five weeks before we boarded for the final stage as the ship demonstrated its capability to project Royal Marines ashore and cope with the extra green personnel onboard. The fact that BOST began on a Friday and happened to coincide with the Army v Navy rugby match was apparently an unfortunate coincidence.

However, once onboard everyone started to settle in – most of 42 Commando were familiar with the ship from Ex Aurora last summer – and the weekend was spent receiving plenty of safety briefs, including the use of anti-flash protective clothing and conducting rehearsals in preparation for the serials that would start on Monday. The Tactical Air Group (TAG), consisting of two Chinooks, four Sea Kings and a brace of Lynx also joined the ship with a mixture of RM, RN and RAF pilots and aircrew.

On Monday, Recce troop cross decked to RFA Sir Galahad and began to gather information on three objectives, while

on HMS Ocean, planning focused on the J Company raid on Portreath airfield to destroy the radar and kill the troop of enemy played by M Company. That evening saw a rehearsal raid with J Company delivered ashore by 9 ASRM LCVPs. The actual raid was conducted the next evening, but this time it was a combined Amphib-helo assault onto the objective. The UML1 is now giving remedial vertical assault lessons to J Company, using MSG and CO's TAC as demo troops, a suitable introduction for Capt Johnstone-Burt RN, Ocean's Captain, in how the Royal Marine's assault beaches.

Wednesday saw the Commando landing to attack the 'Pro-Ginger Front' terrorist camp, headed by ex 42 Cdo RSM Botham at Broughton Burrows, simultaneously conducting a NEO from RMB Chivenor. The operation began with the gun and mortar line being flown ashore while L Company moved by LCVP to conduct the attack in the sand dunes. K Company then flew to Chivenor to evacuate civilians fleeing from the 'Gingers' and escort them to the safety of HMS Ocean. Brigadier Rose and RSM Dawe came along to watch the well-oiled machine that is K Company at work.



The general consensus by both the ship and 42 Commando RM was that the whole serial had moved very smoothly and gone remarkably well. I must, however, mention that during the recovery to HMS Ocean, 29 Commando unfortunately lost one of their Pinz Gauers off the back of the ship. The RAF pilots were adamant that the handbrake had been left off while the vehicle was under slung, so it wasn't their fault as it trundled gently off the deck edge. It was heard that you could hear a 'pinz' drop in the Amphibious Ops Room as they watched it happen on CCTV.

The Unit is also currently ramping Commando in July. This means sized infantry unit to step into any around the globe. This usually high readiness while another



up for taking over as Lead that we will be the first regiment conflict that affects UK interests lasts for about four months at Commando trains up to take over.

The training for this usually starting small and building up Company and then to whole Unit time on Salisbury plain conducting chemical warfare threat, carrying trenches and then living in them) the most of the new Viking vehicle.

involves a series of exercises, from the basics to Company vs exercises. We have spent a lot of NBC exercises against a possible out defensive exercises (digging and adapting our tactics to make



A great deal of emphasis is placed on the Commando's ability to plan and run missions – after all, we could be on our own in somewhere like Sierra Leone. The Commando Planning Group, or the head shed, carry out multiple rehearsals of battle planning procedure before moving to Warminster to undergo what is known as CAST, the Combined Arms Staff Trainer. There, the Commando fights a number of battles on a computer simulator with the HQ being tested to the limits on its ability to react to changes in intelligence, numbers of enemy and generally planning battle operations. We also threw in a new one this year, the Combined Arms Tactical Trainer (CATT) which is an awesome computer generated battlefield, based entirely on Salisbury Plain and with replica UK armour. The troops actually sit in mockups of their vehicles and use exactly the same controls to move around a virtual battlefield, controlled

by the Commando HQ using exactly the same communications systems as normal. When the battles are finished, the Exercise Controlling staff can play back key moments from the battles from a variety of views – bird's eye, commander's eye, driver's eye and show what went right or wrong. It's a fantastic system, especially knowing that the US doesn't have anything like it yet.

BIRTHDAY REFLECTIONS

This month has seen me reach the age of 56. Hardly anyone noticed and there were no celebrations. Just another nail in the coffin lid! Hardly a milestone, but it makes it harder for me to get future employment, as many organisations won't hire old timers regardless of the experience they've accumulated throughout their career - in my case, 40 years. Only another few years to go with National Insurance payments, to reach the required 44 years of contributions necessary for me to receive the full old age pension! Even then I will have to wait until I'm 65 to get my hands on it!

When I was a kid at school in the late '50's, I remember the teacher saying that we'd soon be replaced by robots (i.e. computers) and that we'd have a life of leisure, maybe just doing some part-time work maintaining the robots. What the teacher didn't explain was that if one is replaced with a robot, one is out of work and if one doesn't work one doesn't receive any money! Despite all the robots we now have, I've found that there has only been an increase in work and certainly the life of leisure has escaped me!

I didn't ever want to go to work. As a schoolboy, my only ambition was to leave school, which I hated more than one can imagine. Beyond that I had no idea of what to do except "*stay at home and help Mum*". which was my stock answer when anyone asked me what I wanted to do "*when I grew up*". Maybe I've never "*grown up*", as I still don't want to go to work and would much rather stay at home and do my own thing. As it was, I got an apprenticeship, which I also hated. The business of work is, to me, a vastly over-rated pastime. During the 40 years I've been working and providing for my family, I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of years where there has been some semblance of enjoyment at work. When one is at work, the only thing to look forward to is knocking-off time. As one of my colleagues is fond of saying, the day doesn't start until 2:30 p.m. - when we finish work for the day (we start at 6:30 a.m.). Unfortunately, one is usually too tired to fully exploit the day after 2:30 p.m!

I have too many other things to do in life than work. Sadly, to do those things one needs money, both to live on and to finance them. If I've ever had the time, I've never had the money and if I've had the money, I've never had the time! I guess I've got something wrong somewhere! I think the best time of my life was when I had a few months out of work while I was in the Philippines. Great. Up bright and early every day with something to look forward to - LIVING! Not having to go to work was wonderful - until I ran out of cash and had to find another job (another one which I hated).

Regardless of what job I've had, I have always *done my bit* - and usually a *bit more than my bit*, and will continue to do so, but I now really resent wasting my life by going to work every day. What a total waste of time it is, when the only things to look forward to are the weekends, holidays (and pay-day!). It's rather depressing to think that over the last 40 years, the only times that I've really enjoyed my life have been during the few months that I've been unemployed! I now understand my late grandfather, who was so adamant when he said he wouldn't work a day past his 65th birthday - nor did he! He thoroughly enjoyed his retirement and lived until he was about 90 years old.

I now hear that the UK government is likely to raise the retirement age to 70 years of age. How dare they! Of course, it's just an excuse to rake in more money through taxation and national insurance contributions (even if one has made the 44 years contributions, payment is still extracted from one's salary) and pay out less because people will have less time to enjoy their retirement before they finally die from exhaustion after working for what, in some cases, could be as long as 54 years of misery. Of course, governments and world leaders want to keep us as poor as possible (and working) for as long as possible - just so **they** can control our lives. If we have money and time to enjoy our lives, they don't like that as we have freedom and are able to control our own lives - something which **really** upsets them! Extending the working life as long as possible means that when we do retire, we're too old and tired to really enjoy life in the way we would choose if we were young people.

Sadly, I've achieved very few of the things that are *really* important to me in life (**yet!**), and have had many disappointments on the way, so there are still many things that I'd like to do; driving across Australia (as my late father did in 1945), caravan touring throughout Europe, visiting the wonderful national parks throughout North America, exploring the Picos de Europa, canoeing the river from Madrid to Lisbon and many other adventures. I remember a time when I was about 17 or so, my dream was to buy a Land Rover and drive it round the world. It was a good job I couldn't afford one as it probably wouldn't have made it that far, as they were so unreliable. I knew someone who tried it and he was back after a couple of weeks as it kept breaking-down! He didn't even get it across Europe. He limped it back to the UK and that was the end of his dream - but at least he tried. I didn't even get that far.

I just pray that I will have the health, self-confidence and money to do these things when I am able to retire - the sooner the better!

Alan