

## **Great things come in small packages**

*by Evelien M*

While former RAAF Squadron leader Cherie-Ann Borghouts, 40, is only an inch or two taller than me this woman is a larger than life hero. From being smack bang at the centre of the Iraq war in 2004, where she was fired at on a daily basis, to now the head of her own business Cherie-Ann credits her military training as helping her survive in these very different settings. As a veteran and entrepreneur, she just last week met with Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle on their first day of their Australian tour while mingling with athletes and other dignitaries such as former Olympian Sally Pearson and Sydney's Governor-General.

"I excelled in my Maths and Science during high school, thus initiating my interest in Engineering," Cherie-Ann said. She joined the RAAF in 1996 at the Defence Academy in New South Wales from high school, and gained her Civil Engineering Degree while completing her military training.

"I chose a defence force role as I was looking for something different and challenging," Cherie-Ann said.

During her first posting to HMAS Albatross in Nowra Cherie-Ann oversaw the maintenance of runways and other base facilities.

She was deployed to Iraq in 2004 where she served at the Bagdad International Airport and was in charge of maintaining air traffic control facilities for the Australian Force alongside allied forces.

"I worked alongside coalition personnel as well as Iraqi nationals who weren't used to dealing with professional women. I won't lie, the experience was pretty challenging, but also very rewarding. It was terrifying to be under frequent fire from long range missiles but it was also an extreme honour to represent our country. On deployment and during times of peace in Australia the support given by the Australian Defence Forces and kinmanship helps you both in your career and emotionally."

After returning to Australia she became a mother to two boys. Amongst a wide variety of postings, she served at the RAAF Base Richmond NSW and most recently at RAAF Amberley Queensland.

"Whilst at RAAF Richmond I was Officer in Charge of about 40 defence tradespeople from my category of Airfield Engineering," Cherie-Ann said.

In 2012 she was a temporary Commanding Officer of more than 200 Australian Defence members. "In addition to Airfield Management for the City of Brisbane 23SQN, I was responsible for the emotional well-being of ADF personnel. I wanted them to feel supported."

Having resigned in 2016 Cherie-Ann is still actively involved in the RAAF as a Reservist. It was around this time Cherie-Ann became involved with the Prince Charles Trust entrepreneur programme Lead Your Own Business designed to assist members of the Australian Defence Force looking to transition to civilian life.

She has built her own business Indira Organics after one of her sons was diagnosed with a severe peanut allergy.

"I have been successful because of how resourceful I became during my military career and the love and support of my family," Cherie-Ann said.

Cherie-Ann's business recently featured in the Power 50 publication launched to coincide with the Invictus Games currently underway. The Power 50 are businesses set up by defence veterans. Indira

Organics was nominated by leading military non-profit companies because of her leadership skills and her determination to succeed.

As a member of the Power 50 Cherie-Ann meet Invictus Games founder Prince Harry.

Cherie-Ann encourages other women to consider a future in the ADF.

“Like all organisations the military gender equality is at the forefront of everybody’s minds. It is a very supportive environment with many exciting roles with travel opportunities, not just on deployment but at overseas embassies,” Cherie-Ann concluded.