

Character Doctrine – Luke Gardam

Transcript

Appearing

In order of appearance:

1. CMDR Phillip Smith
2. CPOET Luke Gardam

Recorded: 2023

Location: Australian Defence College

Transcript details

CMDR Phillip Smith	Good morning, Luke. Firstly, thank you for, agreeing to support, the Centre of Leadership, Defence and Ethics, and talking to the vignette that you contributed for Character in the Profession of Arms. I'll just get you to tell me a little bit about yourself and then, elaborate on your story.
CPOET Luke Gardam	Yeah. Thank you, sir. Thanks for having me. So I've been in the Navy for 22 years, approximately. Served my career predominantly on FFH's as a, electronics technician currently on HMS Warramunger as, WE regulator and Chief Sensors and Comms. Obviously, my story why you've invited me here today was to talk about my time at, flood assist, eighteen months ago.
CPOET Luke Gardam	So generally, when I tell the story I lead in from, my time on COVID Assist about 18 months previous to that world famous in a five-star hotel in Melbourne for five weeks. Basically, locked in a room, almost it felt like, for 24 hours a day. With only a few outings to go and do operations, and I found myself kind of thinking I would rather be living in an army tent in a muddy field if I had, you know, a bit more social activity around me.
CPOET Luke Gardam	And lo and behold, 12 months later, that's exactly where I found myself. So, during the flood assist, a lot of navy, army and air force were obviously deployed. After Lismore, I believe copped the brunt of the flooding and the surrounding areas, and we were there to help the communities get back on track. as I said, part of the interesting part of that was we were living in army tents as a group of sailors who were used to having comfy,
CPOET Luke Gardam	inner spring mattress beds and a galley and stuff. So, it was quite a unique time. The work we did in the community, I felt... almost... well not 'almost', very much made that, worthwhile. As much as, you know, some of the times our accommodation that was uncomfortable kind of got overwritten, realized it wasn't forever,



CPOET Luke Gardam and, you know, when you went to a home that was essentially destroyed by the floods and the whole family's full of possessions would lie down on the front lawn, and you were putting it in the back of a truck. You realize that things could be worse than going to sleep on a stretcher in a tent for the night, you just, you know, we still were able to go up the RSL for a feed most nights.

CPOET Luke Gardam And, you know, we were there and there was some good camaraderie.

CMDR Phillip Smith Did you?

CPOET Luke Gardam Yeah.

CMDR Phillip Smith Did you, you know, you talk to the landscape. What about the sort of people you came across? What about the people you were working with?

CPOET Luke Gardam Yeah. So it was, it was interesting. The first part of, it was about five or six weeks in total.

CPOET Luke Gardam So the first part of it was people flying in and bussing in from all over the country. And we were, essentially followed by Singleton barracks. So it was it was interesting to see different, different characters took on different roles. Some were some were assigned roles and some just automatically took on roles to a point, you know, those that felt like they wanted to be leaders.

CPOET Luke Gardam You could tell were pushing themselves to try and rally troops and create a bit of a atmosphere for some, you know, sporting and social activities, while there was very much downtown at the start, whereas other people were quite happy just to sit in the corner and read a book and take it as a chill out time away from the family.

CPOET Luke Gardam Once, we got forward based, we had like a division, I guess you would say almost. So we had, Lieutenant and a couple of young midshipmen were with a command structure. it was interesting to see such young midshipmen step up to really want to take on those roles. and the lieutenant we had at the time, Lieutenant Rose, Pham, was exceptional in the way he, manage expectations of the group as a whole.

CPOET Luke Gardam very much led from the front, to the point when our stay became quite extended towards the end, and I think everyone had had a little bit of a gut full and was ready to go home, was at a point where I think everyone had felt our work was done. Yeah, we kind of seemed to be hanging around a little bit longer.

CPOET Luke Gardam You could tell he had a little bit of emotion in his delivery of the bad news, sometimes, but that kind of soften the blow to the to the troops as a whole that, you know, it wasn't,



- CPOET Luke Gardam It wasn't just, you know, suck it and see kind of moment, it was, you know, this is this is how it is, and we're all in it together. Well, and there were quite a few conversations afterwards that people felt, myself included that, yeah, his delivery of some of those moments definitely made it easier.
- CMDR Phillip Smith So, these challenges that you're talking about was, was Covid still an issue?
- CPOET Luke Gardam Yes, it was, and there was a little bit, but it didn't seem to be a big issue. It was there were a couple of people that had tested positive and had to be isolated. A couple of people had to get flown home, etc. but I think generally speaking, it didn't feel like Covid itself was an issue.
- CPOET Luke Gardam The biggest challenge people had physically, and mentally, was the sleeping arrangements, accommodations for a couple of days where the weather turned horrible. We were literally in leaking tents in a muddy field. Which to some people felt like this was, you know, a challenge. Like, I'd quite enjoy camping. And it was like, yeah, this is just going camping.
- CPOET Luke Gardam People pay to do this. You could tell some people that was, you know, very physically challenging, demanding on them mentally, and you could tell some people it was enough and just about broke them, and the people that were managing that scenario well were trying and supporting the others. So it became a group effort to well, we're all in this together, so you've got to get through it.
- CPOET Luke Gardam But when you go to bed at 9:00 at night, you've got a pillow on your head to stop the roof leaking on your head, and the wind comes through at 2am and rips the roof off the tent, and people are sleeping under toilet blocks. It kind of felt like it created a bit of camaraderie there for a little while.
- CPOET Luke Gardam As much as the challenges kind of gelled, the group together, if you understand what I mean, there.
- CMDR Phillip Smith Was the makeup of the group, did you know each other before you deployed?
- CPOET Luke Gardam So, I was sent with a group of about 20 odd from my home unit. Being that we were all technically based sailors and a lot of the other units had come from non-technical backgrounds,
- CPOET Luke Gardam they tried to keep units together, which helped. So, my group got split up between those other groups. So that had a technical element within each working party. Which kind of, I guess, was a challenge to us in the point that we were, I only had one other person in the group I was with that I'd previously known, but that kind of made it easier to.
- CPOET Luke Gardam I guess for me, I kind of step back from, I can be a little overbearing sometimes in a group. And if I see a scenario on how to do things, whereas it wasn't really my group to lead. So, there was a lieutenant and another PO who very much stood up and kind of took charge as a group as a whole.



- CPOET Luke Gardam You kind of found most people were willing to push themselves beyond probably what their normal comfort zones would be when you find yourself in a garbage dump, unloading truck after truck of some sometimes pretty ordinary smelly garbage and, you know, essentially the contents of people's homes. It's not not fun work, but people did it with a smile on their face because I think they understood the benefit that that was giving to the community.
- CPOET Luke Gardam So, you know, there was there was days where I was drinking, what, ten litres of water in a day. You were sweating that much, working that hard, which is not what a sailor on a ship would normally do. You're normally in confined, comfy, air-conditioned things, and you find yourself in a smelly garbage, dump. yeah, I think I think.
- CPOET Luke Gardam I think that pushed a lot of people very much beyond what their normal comfort zones were in those circumstances.
- CMDR Phillip Smith Did you feel the synergy of the group, from obviously when you first got together and when you left, did you feel that that character, that connection?
- CPOET Luke Gardam Yeah, most definitely. Like any environment where you're, you know, larger groups that were small, smaller groups developed, there was, a group of people that would play board games and cards, a group of people that would exercise nonstop all day.
- CPOET Luke Gardam There is a group of divers that enjoyed walking around in their budgie smugglers trying to make their tent city, and you could tell it was reminded me a little bit like when you watch Mash and you saw them living in tent cities. I think that was Korea that was based. It felt like that for a little bit.
- CPOET Luke Gardam and you could see a lot of people, the characters probably came out to the front where they wouldn't normally be able to do that in the normal day to day working environment. so, yeah, look, I, I found some of the challenges definitely bonded people when you're in a tent of seven people and at 2:00 in the morning, the tent disappears from above your head because the rain and wind ripped it apart.
- CPOET Luke Gardam You've you have no choice but to gel as a group to how you're going to overcome that challenge. So, I think everybody left probably a lot more gelled as a group than they definitely started off as.
- CMDR Phillip Smith Excellent. Okay, Luke, thank you very much. Thank you for your time today, really appreciate it, and supporting the release of 'Character in the ADF' doctrine.

