



DUST OF URUZGAN

Review by Amy Cooper

Dust of Uruzgan, the latest album from talented singer/songwriter Fred Smith, offers a fresh, unrestrained perspective on the work being done in Afghanistan.

An Australian diplomat, Fred was posted to Uruzgan province, southern Afghanistan in July 2009.

Dust of Uruzgan tells heartfelt tales of his 18 months living and working with Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force Two on the

Multinational Base in Tarin Kot and at Forward Operating Base Mirwais in the Chora Valley.

This deeply personal collection of songs shares the moments and stories Fred was most profoundly touched by through his hallmark mix of honesty and humour.

Fred Smith is blessed with a conversational style – no one can spin a yarn set to music quite like he can. His bold and heartfelt lyrics paint vivid images of the many facets of life in Afghanistan.

Dust of Uruzgan is raw, foot-tapping folk at its best – it will gradually and irreversibly get under your skin and into your heart.

Fred Smith continues in the tradition of Australian war ballads of the likes of *And the band played Waltzing Matilda*, *Khe Sanh* and *I was only 19*.

With a liberal peppering of TLAs throughout his songs, I'm curious whether soldiers truly see Fred as one of their own or just another passing voyeur, as he pays tribute to the tough work that is so selflessly done. He certainly seems to give honest voice to the duty and honour, frustration and boredom, camaraderie and bonds of mateship so integral to conflict.

Fred Smith's songs ultimately embody the humour and compassion required to survive the intensity of life at war.

Dust of Uruzgan belongs in every soldier's stocking this Christmas.



BACKGROUND

Songwriter Fred Smith was the first Australian DFAT officer to be posted to Uruzgan in July 2009. He served for 18 months in the province alongside soldiers from 1RAR, 6RAR and 5RAR, working for a year at the Multinational Base in Tarin Kot before leading a PRT District Team up to FOB Mirwais in the Chora Valley after the Dutch withdrawal.

Dust of Uruzgan is a collection of 12 stories from the war, some written from Fred's own point of view, others drawing on observations of soldiers around him.

Three of the songs pay tribute to fallen soldiers including Ben Ranaudo (*Dust of Uruzgan*),

Darren Smith and Jacob Moerland (*Sapper's Lullaby*) and, in *August 20*, to Grant Kirby and Tomas Dale, who lived in the tent next door at FOB Mirwais.

Soldiers who served in TK with Fred will fondly remember the concerts at Poppy's where Fred pulled together bands from musically competent Australian, US and Dutch soldiers as well as Afghan sanitation workers.

Fred Smith has worked with the ADF before. In 2002, he released *Bagarap Empires*, an acclaimed collection of songs he wrote while working in Bougainville and Solomon Islands.