

## **Interviews with War Dog Operatives**

Series 1, Profile 6 – Korea

### **Captain John M Hutcheson MC – Royal Australian Engineers**

Dateline for this profile is 09 January 2010.

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#### **Background**

Captain (Capt) John M Hutcheson was born in 1927 at Townsville, Queensland. In 1940, John's family moved to Newcastle where he completed his education to NSW Intermediate level. John entered Duntroon on 24 February 1945 and graduated into the Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) with the rank of Lieutenant. He was posted to the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan (BCOF) for twelve months. He was Troop Commander in 12 Field Company RAE and took over as Acting Officer Commanding the Coy when his boss moved on to other work there. On his return to Australia (RTA), he attended Sydney University to complete his studies at the Bachelor Level for his Degree in Engineering (BE), and was promoted to Captain prior to his graduation. On graduation from University, John was posted to 20 Field Park Squadron RAE in Sydney.

#### **Korea 1952**

In 1952, John was posted again to Japan to the British Commonwealth Forces – Korea (BCFK). While in Japan, John was re-posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of The Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR) as the Assault Pioneer Platoon (Aslt Pnr Pl) Commander. In those days the Aslt Pnr Pl was commanded by an RAE Captain. John assumed command of the Aslt Pnr Pl in the 3 RAR Support Coy position on Hill 187. This position was elevated and had direct vision of the Chinese positions across the valley, through which the Samichon River flowed. These hills were nicknamed “Matthew”, “Mark” and “Luke”. The hill named “John” was out of sight to the Australian troops occupying Hill 187. The Chinese troops also had direct vision of the Australians and the area between both forces, “no-man’s land”, was fiercely contested by both sides. For a short period of time, John visited the British Field Park Squadron and received some training in military working dog handling. This exposure to dogs would be a prophetic gesture in the near future. Patrols and ambushes were a nightly occurrence and violent clashes were experienced practically every night. The Chinese Artillery shelled Hill 187 with particular attention and intensity because it housed 3 RAR Coy elements and had a section of the 3 RAR Mortar Platoon on its reverse slope. 3 RAR had recently executed the brilliant attack on the Chinese forces at the Battle of Maryan San and were now into the Defence Phase of warfare back in the Australian sector of the British Commonwealth Divisional area. The Korean War had become a slogging match between the Allies and the North Korean/Chinese Forces. 3 RAR dug in deep and adopted trench warfare. John's platoon position received some serious shelling while located on top of Hill 187 and the platoon was withdrawn to a defensive platoon position, protecting the Bn HQ. From here the Aslt Pnr

Pl conducted reconnaissance patrols, fighting and standing patrols into no-man's-land. It also placed on their Platoon Commander, an unenviable task.

Captain Hutcheson had the job of locating and plotting minefields on to maps. These minefields were all laid by friendly forces. The Chinese did not lay minefields in the British sector. However, the minefields had been penetrated many times and heavy artillery bombardments had made the original records and minefield marking arrangements, questionable. On location of a minefield, John would undertake a night patrol of two personnel. Himself and a signaller with a radio. He would measure and mark the extremities of each minefield and ensure that the minefield gaps were safe and well marked. For this work, John was awarded a personal Military Cross (MC). (Note: some officers received an MC as a reward for the work of their unit as a collective effort. Other officers received the MC for outstanding performance on their individual merit. John Hutcheson was one such man).

John handled a dog himself in this area. In his words: "The Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) (this is the Bn doctor) complained to the 3 RAR Commanding Officer (CO), who was Lt Col Ron Hughes, that he, the RMO, had never been on a patrol into no-man's-land. The CO arranged for the 2 IC of D Coy (Captain John Warteton) to take him on a night patrol. The patrol moved out through D Coy and within five minutes of leaving, patrolled straight into a Chinese force which attacked them. Travelling with the patrol was a Lance Corporal (LCpl) Edward Hannen from the King's Regiment (British Army) who was there for familiarisation purposes. The King's Regiment were about to relieve 3 RAR in place. In the ensuing battle, the LCpl was killed in action (KIA) and there were several Australians hit at the same time. The wounded needed to be guided back through the nearest minefield. I was sent out to find Warteton's patrol and guide them back through the minefield. The dead LCpl was left behind. So, the next night, the Bn Intelligence Officer (Captain Poinangar) sent me out again to try and locate the KIA LCpl. I was given a mine detecting dog and escorted by the same diggers who were attacked the night previously. I believe that these diggers were not too keen to do this patrol and they appeared a bit nervous to me. I led the patrol out with the dog on a long lead. We traversed the minefield and out into no-man's-land, but then the dog caught the scent of dead and wounded Chinese soldiers who had been dragged away from the battle site toward Hill 75 (Matthew). These dead and wounded Chinese soldiers had been dragged by their mates to the Samichon River and then back into their own lines. The dog was following the drag marks and taking me straight toward the Chinese positions. The dog was a German Shepherd with good ability to detect mines and explosives and also track humans, particularly Chinese or North Koreans. However, the escort team were showing signs of not wanting to continue, so I called the dog off the search and we returned to our own lines. I did not locate the dead LCpl. He was found and brought back the following night by another patrol".

It is noteworthy that John must be the only person in military history who handled a war dog on operations at the rank of Captain and with a Military Cross.

John was rotated out of 3 RAR after six months and became the Intelligence Officer Royal Engineers (IORE) of 28 Field Engineer Regiment (Royal Engineers). This was a part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commonwealth Division stationed in Korea. John completed his tour of duty in Korea in 1953 and RTA to the 20<sup>th</sup> National Service Bn and then on to the new IORE position at the School of Military Engineering (SME).

### **Mine Dogs at SME**

Following his IORE work, John was promoted to Major and became the OC of Field Engineer Wing (FEW) at SME. At that time military working dogs were classified by the Army as “Engineer Stores”. It was decided that dogs were useful for mine detection, tracker work and guard duties and so, in 1953, dog kennels were built by the sappers at SME. John was the first OC FEW to have a mine dog section as a part of his command, and he recruited the initial handlers and dogs. Some dogs were purchased and others were donated to SME. A training programme which followed the British Army system was introduced, and mine and guard dog training began in earnest. Some of the handlers had Korea experience, but many were yet to be tested on the battlefield known as the “Malayan Emergency” in Malaya against the Communist Terrorists. As Korea drew to a ceasefire, the Malayan Emergency (1955 to 1960) gave a new sense of urgency to the dog section at SME.

The dog section was commanded by Warrant Officer L.C. Garland, but this person had never received formal military working dog training. The kennel master was Cpl George Gray and John recognised his Cpl as being the most appropriate trainer of the dogs. Cpl Gray had been a very experienced dog trainer and handler in Korea and had received formal training in dog handling and training from the British Army’s Royal Engineers. Cpl Gray was to go on to lead and train dogs in Malaya. Sapper Lance Abbott arrived in 1953 after serving with dogs in Korea.

With the passage of time, the Australian Infantry took over responsibility of training tracker dogs and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) took over the training of guard dogs. The call for mine and explosive detection dogs diminished with the cessation of the Malayan Emergency, and so the mine dog section at SME was terminated in 1959.

### **John’s Career as a Commando**

In 1956, John was posted as the Staff Officer Grade 2 - Administration (SO2 Admin) in the Chief Engineer’s office at Victoria Barracks in Sydney. Not long after he started as the SO2 Admin, he was sent to the United Kingdom (UK) and trained with the Royal Marine Commando for his future role as the OC 2<sup>nd</sup> Commando Coy (2 Cdo Coy) in Melbourne. John became proficient in parachuting, shallow-water diving, small boat handling, landing craft operations, cliff climbing, and amphibious warfare. John earned his green beret in the UK. From the UK, John was posted to Malaya and operated with 22 Squadron of the Special Air Service (SAS) on the Thai/Malay border. He also operated with New Zealand SAS in the Sungei Perak area. His tenure was for three months after which he RTA to command 2 Cdo Coy. John commanded 2 Cdo Coy for

two years and was then selected to attend the Australian Staff College at Queenscliff in Victoria.

### **John's Military Career after 1958 and his Second Building of the Dog Kennels at SME**

John attended Staff College and graduated at the end of 1959 when he was posted for two years, as an instructor, to the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra in Queensland. In 1961, he was posted to Central Command HQ in Adelaide, South Australia as the Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter Master General (DAA&QMG). John's next posting was the Director of Engineer Stores, initially in Melbourne and later in Canberra. He was in this posting for almost five years, during which time he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. In late 1969, John was posted as the CO and Chief Instructor (CI) of SME.

John came into contact with military working dogs again during his tenure as CO/CI SME. In 1970, the Army decided to re-introduce mine and explosive detecting dogs in answer to the growing combat casualty lists caused through mines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) in the Vietnam War (1960 to 1973). In 1970, Captain George Hulse was selected to attend the Mine and Tunnel Dog Course at the United States Army Base at Fort Benning, Georgia, USA. John's words of advice to Hulse as he was leaving to go to the USA were: "Make sure you learn about how to prevent gun-shyness in dogs. They are no good in war if they are gun-shy". Those words of advice were to have a profound effect on the dog training programme introduced into SME by Hulse in 1971. John had the task of building the dog kennels at SME for the second time in his career. He selected a young National Service engineer officer who had a long association with architects and construction, and the kennels were substantially finished by the time Hulse began recruiting his personnel and dogs in December 1970/January 1971.

In 1971, John was posted to Vietnam as the Chief Engineer based at Saigon, but he was required to travel extensively in South Vietnam inspecting and reporting on engineer operations and projects. On his RTA a year later, John became the Chief of Staff of Logistics Command based in Moore Park, Sydney. In 1973, John was posted into the Army Reserve (ARes) albeit it was still called the Citizens Military Forces (CMF) at that time. John was promoted to Colonel and held the position of Colonel (Plans) for many years until 1982. John reached retirement age for the Army in 1982 and retired from military life after almost 38 years of service.

### **John's Academic career**

John completed his Bachelor of Engineering Degree at Sydney University. Graduated from the University of Queensland with a Bachelor of Commerce. John completed his Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the University of NSW. John then went on to complete his Doctorate at the University of NSW, part of which was completed at Harvard University at Boston in the USA. John served as Senior Lecturer and Visiting

Professor at the University of NSW and also as a consultant. John is still actively employed as a consultant in his own company.

John's post-nominals include:

- ACM = American Commendation Medal – as CE AFV
- TSM {RVN} – Technical Services Medal {Republic of Vietnam} – awarded twice: By the Province Chief of Phuoc Tuy On the final withdrawal



*SMILE! Major J. M. Hutchison helps three-month-old Casula Terror to pose for his first picture. The pup was one of a litter of strays, but is now an Army pet.*

Major John M Hutcheson MC in a newspaper article circa 1955. Image courtesy of Sgt Colin “Smiley” Matthews and gifted to LtCol Hulse in 2009.



*ATTEN-SHUN! The dog platoon sits stiffly at attention with their handlers and the officer-in-charge, Major J. M. Hutchison (on right).*

Major John M Hutcheson MC with his Mine Dog Section in a newspaper article circa 1955. Image courtesy of Sgt Colin “Smiley” Matthews and gifted to LtCol Hulse in 2009.

The war diary of 3RAR contains the following entries: -

"29 Sep 52 - 2215 " Dog patrol moved out through SONGGOK on search for missing member of KING's Regiment."

"30 Sep 52 - 0001 dog patrol returned - apparently the dog picked up the scent at the foot of SONGGOK but lost it in water filled paddies. Thorough search of the area traversed by the dog revealed nothing".

"31 Oct 52 2100 - pnr's wiring the minefield fence in front of Yong Dong { @ 122105 } report voices and dogs across the SAMICHON RIVER from them." (Hutch's comment : "We were in the YONG DONG Position to the right of the HOOK. These two positions were separated by the Samichon River but the dogs were heard on our front not on the HOOK. - The Chinese appeared to use guard dogs in their main positions for early warning of our attacks etc - I am not aware of them being used in No Man's Land or indeed extensively").

Some additional comments from John Hutcheson MC:

#### MINEFIELD DETECTION

"In the Britcom Divisional area all the minefields had been laid by United Nations Forces. I walked and plotted all of the minefields on the Kansas {Reserve Line} which was the launching position for Op Commando to the final Divisional trench warfare area and the site of the Gloucester Battle etc. I was helped by some minefield records - good and bad. Often I found mines outside the fences".

"I also walked and plotted the minefields in the FDLS, some of which I had to find - as battles had traversed these minefields".

#### CHINESE ATTITUDE TO MINEWARFARE

Unlike the Vietnam War, the Chinese did not actively lay anti-personal mines on our front. My problem was finding minefields laid by friendly forces who had previously occupied our positions. In their attacks the Chinese tried to skirt our minefields or move through our gaps in minefields but often in the " bug - out" they rushed through the minefields with resultant casualties.