

## **Interviews with War Dog Operatives**

Series 4, Profile 9 – Afghanistan

### **Corporal James Hoy – Royal Australian Engineers**

Dateline for this profile is 30 July 2010.

#### **Background**

Corporal (CPL) James (Jim) Hoy was born in Perth, Western Australia on 20 December 1971. Jim was educated in the local primary and secondary schools of Perth and left school at the age of seventeen. He took up a traineeship as a surveyor for about twelve months and on 16 October 1990, Jim decided to join the Australian Regular Army (ARA). He went to the 1<sup>st</sup> Recruit Training Battalion (1 RTB) at Kapooka and passed his nineteenth birthday there. On graduation from 1 RTB, Jim was allocated to the Royal Australian Corps of Transport (RACT), completed his Initial Employment Training (IET) at Puckapunyal in Victoria and graduated as a “truckie”. On graduation from his RACT initial training, Jim was posted to the 5<sup>th</sup> Transport Squadron (5 TPT SQN) RACT at Enoggera in Brisbane.

After about twelve months with 5 TPT SQN, Jim attended full time schooling at the Blamey Education Centre which allowed him to complete his year twelve education. He completed that in late 1992 and then in early 1993, Jim noticed an advertisement calling for personnel to join the Royal Australian Engineers (RAE). He particularly noticed the combat engineer theme and saw combat engineers with explosive detection dogs (EDD). In late 1993, Jim applied to Corps transfer to RAE and in early 1994, Jim was posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Combat Engineer Regiment (3 CER) in Townsville. However, Jim did not undertake his IET as an engineer soldier until mid-1995. He was very valuable to 3 CER as a truck driver and was undertaking on-the-job-training for his field engineer skills. Jim attended his engineer IET in 1995 at the School of Military Engineering based at Moorebank in the Sydney area. On completion of his IET, Jim was returned back to 3 CER in Townsville where he continued his advanced training to become a combat engineer.

Jim noticed the activity and training involved with the EDD and decided that he wanted to be an EDD handler. However, Jim was posted to the 17<sup>th</sup> Construction Squadron (17 CONST SQN) based in the Sydney area and continued to use his driving skills to support the work undertaken by 17 CONST SQN. Jim was promoted to Lance Corporal (LCPL) in early 1997, but still wanted to give EDD handling a try. In late 1998, Jim applied for EDD handling training and was accepted in early 1999.

#### **The Olympic and Para-Olympic Games in Sydney 2000**

Jim was teamed up with EDD Axle on his initial dog handlers course at SME. Axle was the last of the active response dogs to be retained by RAE. An active response dog is allowed to become excited over the discovery of a stimulus. Not a good idea when working with tripwires or touchy pressure plate fired bombs. Axle was a German

Shepherd x Dingo and also had a few socialising problems with people he did not know. There were a few warding off bites which Jim had to keep an eye on. By the time Axle passed away, all the EDD were being trained in passive response, which is to say that they remain quiet and preferably quite still when they detect the presence of an item of interest.

Jim worked with Axle for two years which included the counter-terrorist roles during the Sydney Olympics and Para-Olympics in 2000. Jim was able to retain his rank as LCPL on transferring to the dogs and commanded a section of EDD handlers for the months leading up to, and including the Games themselves. The EDD teams were present for search duties in June, some six weeks before the Games began. They went into “lock-down mode” and remained on site searching and checking all the buildings, storage containers and facilities at all hours of the day and night. The EDD teams supported the Army Reserve (ARES) soldiers who manned vehicle check points and individual person check points. Some high profile routes such as the Marathon and the Athletes March at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies were checked and a lot of vehicle searches at VCP around Sydney. This continued right through the August Olympic and Para-Olympic Games until they were “stood down” in November 2000. A five month commitment.

Before the Olympics in Sydney, the Joint Incident Response Unit (JIRU) had been established at Holsworthy in NSW and Jim was attached to the EDD Troop of that unit. A short time after the Olympics had been completed, JIRU downsized and Jim went back to SME as an instructor training dogs and handlers in the EDD stream. Jim was promoted to Corporal (CPL) but unfortunately, Axle had veterinary and behavioural complications and had to be put down.

During 2001, Jim trained three EDD including Ingrid, Ribbon and Kylie. Kylie became Jim’s EDD when he returned to the renamed JIRU now named the Chemical, Biological and Radiological Squadron (CBR SQN) stationed at Holsworthy near Sydney. Jim and Kylie trained with the CBR SQN until January 2003 when they were posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Combat Engineer Regiment (2 CER) based at Enoggera in Brisbane.

### **The Combat Engineer Regiments 2003**

To supply the demands for EDD support to the Olympic Games in Sydney, the EDD Sections of the CERs had to be disbanded and concentrated in the Sydney area. At the completion of the Olympics in Sydney and to respond to the growing concern for counter-terrorist activity after 11 September 2001, the EDD Sections were reconstituted in the CERs. Jim and Kylie were allocated to 2 CER and Jim’s job was to re-establish the EDD capability in that unit. In 2003, the EDD Section was administered by the 20<sup>th</sup> Support Squadron of 2 CER and commanded by the Regimental Headquarters. In 2004, the EDD Section was placed under command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Squadron (7 CES) of 2 CER. There were four dog teams in 7 CES initially including Sapper (SPR) Justin Dunn with EDD Jebb, SPR Graham “Pommy” Ellis and his EDD Bailey, and SPR Phil Grazier with his EDD Buster. Jim commanded this section until his discharge from the ARA in May 2005.

**The Solomon Islands 2003 and 2004.** Jim served in the Solomon Islands twice. Both of those combat profiles can be read at Profile No. 3, Series 2 under the “Combat Profiles” tab above.

### **Discharge, Re-engagement and the IRR**

After Jim arrived home from the Solomon Islands, he discharged from the ARA and worked for the Customs Department in the Marine Unit for a few months. He missed Army life and decided to re-engage into the ARES. He was allocated to 7 CES as a combat engineer. However, the CBR SQN had been re-named the Immediate Response Regiment (IRR) based at Holsworthy and the EDD capability in IRR asked for Jim to work in Brisbane training up EDD teams. He accepted and as an ARES soldier began full time duty back in the 2 CER kennels. This was fortuitous because the 2 CER EDD teams had been disbanded yet again and the kennels were available for Jim’s work with the IRR. Jim was told that the EDD he was training were intended for service in Afghanistan. Jim’s assistants included another combat engineer and a civilian dog training contractor.

In 2007, the mounting Australian casualty list due to improvised explosive devices (IED) in Afghanistan caused a surge in interest for deploying more EDD to that Theatre of War. In November 2007, Jim was told that he was about to be sent to Afghanistan with an EDD.

### **Afghanistan 2008**

Jim teamed up with EDD Bailey and together with SPR Sam Rutherford and EDD Sharne, a section of combat engineers, and a detachment of explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technicians, departed Brisbane for pre-deployment training in Sydney. At the completion of pre-deployment training, they flew from Sydney by commercial air charter to Darwin and then on to The Maldive Islands then to Kuwait and finally, in January 2008 arrived at Tarin Kowt (TK) in Afghanistan.

On arrival at TK, Jim needed to revisit his combat engineer skills and completed in-country training before going into the field as a part of Special Operations Task Group 6 (SOTG 6). The weather in Afghanistan in January 2008 was very cold with snow covering the ground everywhere. These conditions gave the newly arrived Australians some four weeks of training opportunities prior to being deployed on patrols. There were joint activities with the Netherlands Army who commanded that area. The Forward Operating Base (FOB) is named “Kamp Holland”.

Jim and Bailey served about 100 days of the 180 days on patrols. Bailey found 15 caches. These caches included RPG 7 launchers and ammunition, linked machine gun ammo, AK 47 rifles and lots of grenades. Jim recalls: “many of our finds, probably about one third of them, were not really intended for military use. Clearly, many AK 47s were used by the farmers for their local defence and for keeping their farm animals protected from wild animals and putting down old or diseased animals. However, the machine gun ammo and the RPG 7s were hidden for use by the Taliban against targets of opportunity – us”.

During Jim's deployment to Afghanistan, convoys were occasionally attacked with Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG 7) but this was erratic and ineffective. Largely, the Taliban preferred to engage them outside Coalition mortar range with the Russian made 107 mm weapon. It was rare in Jim's deployment to be engaged by rifle fire at close range. This would change as time passed and, in addition, the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) was to become almost the weapon of choice for the Taliban.

Jim and his mates came under indirect fire from the Taliban from time to time. This included an incident where: "we searched a village, moved back to our vehicles and drove into the Green Belt where we set up a night harbour position. We were with V Platoon, 4 RAR and we harboured in an area where we had vision over the confluence of two rivers below us. On a higher feature behind us, a platoon from 4 RAR (codenamed Tango) had an overwatch duty to protect us in case things got nasty during the night. Our intelligence intercepted Taliban radio chatter which indicated that we were about to be shelled by 107mm rockets. We braced for action and the rockets arrived but impacted behind our position – between us and the Tango overwatch position. The Tango element considered that they were being engaged from a position in the valley and opened fire on it. Unfortunately, some civilian casualties were suffered in this exchange of fire. We had the job of rescuing the wounded and evacuating them for treatment at the military hospital. We did this immediately, we did not wait until next morning. We were all affected emotionally by the sight of the women and kids who were hit, but it was a job that had to be done, so we put our feelings behind us and just got on with getting them to medical aid as quickly as we possibly could".

To make matters worse, Jim had another incident for which he was unprepared. Jim: "I was engaged in searching a kwala (house) when I accidentally stepped on a new born baby. It was an incident that shook me up at the time given I was a new Dad myself. Strange thing was that Keemo (Sapper Brendan Keemink), who I had relieved when he rotated out of country in January 2008, had done the exact same thing. During a compound clearance, Bailey and I were searching the inside of a kwala when I stepped on a pile of rags in the middle of the dimly lit room. I was fully loaded up at a total patrol weight just under 120 kg. Thought I heard a lamb cry, but when I unravelled the bundle, I found a heavily swaddled baby girl. We stopped the search and handed the infant over to the medics before having a break to re-gather concentration. This incident sort of threw me at the time because, although Keemo had mentioned his incident in passing, I had mentally prepared myself for the stress of IED searches, contacts with enemy, and dead bodies. This was completely out of left field and affected me deeply at the time. Pretty bitter that the locals, whom we had mustered in the outside area, didn't seem to care - maybe all their male kids were accounted for and the little girl was forgotten?".

Jim and Bailey were to prove a big point during one of their patrols. In Jim's words: "Bailey and I were called to search a kwala where other search teams had been. Three other search teams had found nothing, but when Bailey indicated that there was an item of interest located in a solid wall of the kwala, we carefully dug out the area where he was indicating and uncovered a cache containing 700 rounds of 7.62mm linked machine

gun ammo”. At times, the EDD teams work under the pressure of time. In an incident in a village, there was an imperative for the platoon to be clear of the village and emplane on helicopters at a certain time. It was V Platoon again, and the Platoon Commander needed to conclude his search and move his platoon to the HLZ for the helo lift. But, as happens in war, he needed to change his plans. Bailey, at the point of time when they were required to leave the area, gave Jim a very strong indication of an item of interest buried inside a mud brick wall. Jim: “I told the EOD technician that Bailey had indicated that the wall contained a possible cache. They were under pressure to leave the village, particularly since it was becoming dark in the kwala. So I grabbed a set of bolt cutters and use them as crude pick, it was all I had at the time as the rest of the Engineer kit was divvied out among the lads, and my wooden prod was unsuitable, and scraped at the wall. To our surprise, a grenade fell out. To our relief we saw that it was unfused and not booby-trapped. The Grenade wasn't the clincher to stay on target and search further. When we continued to dig and found two Iridium satellite telephones, we discovered that they had a whole lot of valuable intelligence information stored on them. Further searching confirmed that the kwala was a definite Taliban location and V Platoon was able to detain several combatant aged males who ‘lived there’. They were identified by the information stored on the satellite telephones as Taliban and taken away for interrogation”. The helos were delayed by V Platoon and the end result was a large haul of intelligence material and Taliban operatives. It pays to be thorough.

But it wasn't all success for the EDD team. Jim recounts one miss where he and Bailey had been searching for five hours in the heat – an extreme test for any dog – and Jim was fatigued as well. They went past two AK 47s which were found by another non-dog search team. This caused Jim some embarrassment, but it was a pragmatic lesson that dog teams should not be expected to be infallible.

At times, Jim had some disturbing moments things went bad. In Jim's words: “My unit came under direct fire on one occasion. I was not involved in this incident as I had torn ligaments in my ankle jumping an irrigation ditch in Mirabad and spent a few weeks manning the vehicle weapon systems back in harbour positions, but my Victor Platoon Engineer detachment (with which I would have been working had I had not been injured) was searching a route when LCPL Jason Marks was tragically shot dead in an ambush. At the time I had to provide early warning as sentry into dead ground near the HLZ used for the evacuation of KIA/WIA. I did not really know Jason as my involvement with him was the occasional shake for gun piquet, but his loss and subsequently learning about the two small children he left behind, was a big wake up call for us all, especially the new Dads among us, like me. Bailey and I were, on occasions (maybe four or five times), waiting in a forward LUP prior to a Direct Action when Commandos exchanged fire with ‘squirters’ - slang for Afghani fighting age males that fled from Coalition troops upon our arrival, while often carrying weapons. The exchanges with squirters were always brief and one sided. I didn't get the chance to fire at any squirters”.

But it was not always squirters they engaged. On another Mission: “Up near Gizab, close to the border of Northern Uruzgan Province, engineers, including myself, Bailey and an EOD technician, were deployed against insurgents where a contact was highly likely. We

were tasked to clear a route bounded by steep terrain on both sides and then destroy a large boulder dropped into the ravine by the enemy. Recon and sniper elements did the hard yards up the features that paralleled the road to preposition themselves for the Mission. We destroyed the boulder using explosives, with the expectation that the enemy would stir up activity when it all went noisy. Ineffective fire from the border was noted, and the Commandos engaged at a distance but were ordered not to follow up due to possible deconfliction issues with other Coalition forces in the next province. The EOD Tech and I pretty much sat down behind another boulder in the middle of the ravine and ate a meal whilst the Recon and Snipers had exchanges with the Taliban. Then we withdrew - Tango had a crack up a Main Supply Route (MSR) running north and to the east of us. Our commanders decided that insurgents were too well dug in on high ground and after a lengthy wait, US FAS (American ground attack aircraft) was called in to JDAM (bring intense fire to bear on) the entire feature”.

At the completion of Jim’s deployment in Afghanistan, Bailey and Sharne returned to Australia (RTA) with SPR Rutherford and went into quarantine at Eastern Creek for 30 days. Jim remained in-country and briefed the new EDD teams who were CPL David Simpson and SPR Zeke Smith. Jim departed TK by air and RTA via Kuwait, The Arab Emirates, The Maldiv Islands, Darwin and finally Sydney.

### **Customs and ARES**

The day after Jim arrived back into Australia he was discharged from full-time duty and allocated back to his ARES position in 2 CER, Brisbane. Jim went on post-combat duty leave and then resumed his job with Customs in the Maritime Unit. Six months later he was officially de-briefed and he became an Inactive Army Reservist. Jim would be happy to come back into the ARES in an EDD training role. He believes that there is a plenty of scope for ARES employment in the EDD stream in areas such as rewrites of EDD training doctrine, providing on the job training for EDD trainees and training dogs. Clearly, there is intellectual property available to the Australian Defence Force by encouraging combat experienced personnel to take up Defence Reserve positions and pass their knowledge on to the current cohort of the Defence community.

Jim would like to develop his employment within Customs to more shore based operations working out of Brisbane, because he is married with two young boys. He would enjoy a position with Customs border protection dogs and would be happy to mix that with an ARES contribution to the EDD stream. The winner in that mix of Jim’s considerable experience, dedication to duty and knowledge, would be the Commonwealth of Australia.

### **EDD 457 Bailey**

Recruited from the Border Collie rescue website in June 2007, members of IRR travelled to his home in Canberra to test and subsequently recruit him for the IRR funded EDD training course which was held at 2CER that year. Bailey’s owner (Louise) had to give him up due to work pressures – she is a member of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and was being posted overseas. There are a number of unusual

coincidences which occurred between Louise, Bailey and the EDD handlers. Sapper Shaun Ward (an RAE EDD handler) bumped into her in Randwick NSW. Louise, was on her way to Kabul or somewhere similar and met Shaun at pre-deployment training. It's a small world. Another coincidence was after the EDD handlers nicknamed Bailey "Tip Rat". Louise sent Jim an email which included the words: "I love that you guys called him 'Tip Rat', as I often referred to him as my 'little rat dog'".



EDD 457 Bailey (aka "The Tip Rat"). Image courtesy of Jim Hoy 2010.



CPL Jim Hoy and EDD Bailey, Afghanistan 2008. Image courtesy of Jim Hoy 2010.



CPL Jim Hoy and Bailey on patrol, Afghanistan 2008. Image courtesy of Jim Hoy 2010.