

Interviews with War Dog Operatives

Series 2, Profile 3 – The Solomon Islands

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 1st 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 5th 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 3rd 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 17th 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 2nd 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 20th Support Squadron of 2 CER and commanded by the Regimental Headquarters. In 2004, the EDD Section was placed under command of the 7th 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 – First Deployment

In July 2003, Jim took his EDD Team to The Solomon Islands. His team included SPR Craig Turnbull and EDD Chloe, SPR Pommy Ellis and EDD Bailey (not the Bailey that Jim had trained), and SPR Phil Grazier and EDD Buster. His dog for this deployment was EDD Kylie. They flew by RAAF C130 (Hercules) transport aircraft from Townsville direct to Honiara.

The principal role for the EDD team in 2003 was to support the 18th Field Squadron RAE (18 FD SQN) from 3 CER. 18 FD SQN was employed on a number of “Sapper Tasks” which included search of vehicles, buildings and people for dangerous items of interest, in addition to the normal array of engineering support given by an Army engineer unit to the civil authority.

The accommodation was as rudimentary as it was spartan. The diggers were housed in tents and the dogs lived in their fibreglass transportation boxes. They were located at the end of the Honiara airstrip which at that time had aircraft arriving and departing every few minutes by day and night. Sleep and creature comforts were a luxury, but as much of the work was conducted away from that area, the dog teams did find respite from the noise when they went on patrols with the Australian Federal Police (AFP). However, the search activity was limited by a Gun Amnesty which allowed the locals to carry a weapon, provided they were going to hand it in to the authorities. Consequently, there were many targets which might have been pursued, but were left alone until the Gun Amnesty lapsed.

The operations were controlled principally by the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR) and there were a number of missions away from the Honiara area such as to places such as the island of Ontong Java. A hotspot for potential trouble and illegal activity was Malaita, an island to the north of Guadalcanal where the EDD teams conducted searches and inspections in support of 2 RAR and the AFP.

Jim and Kylie were often deployed by 18 FD SQN in support of the AFP, Protective Services and the local authorities. The role was to assist in cordon and search operations, helping the Police to issue warrants for the arrest of individuals and checking the security of buildings such as Magistrates Courts, infrastructure and detention centres. This was particularly highlighted when “high value criminals” were being detained, charged and prosecuted. Jim’s team supported patrols in the bush and along roads.

A big job was the checking the movement of freight and baggage as it came into Honiara. There was little established procedure and minimal civilian capability to undertake the enormous quantity of baggage. This was an area where the speed of search of the EDD contributed to the efficiency of day-to-day civil administration.

The EDD teams were able to locate some small caches of stolen explosives (from the local mines) and ammunition. Ironically, many of these finds were achieved when the dog handlers set a training course for their dogs by “planting” stimulus for their dogs to

find, and in the middle of the training session, the dogs came up with the real thing. Although there were not a host of finds for the EDD teams, there was nothing found behind the EDD Teams after they had searched an area.

Operations included working with the HMAS Diamantina, helicopter insertions into incredibly rugged terrain with the Army and AFP, and vehicle landing craft to the numerous islands

The deployment ended in September 2003, when Jim brought his EDD team back to Brisbane on board a commercial air carrier. The dogs were quarantined at Eastern Creek near Sydney for 30 days and then returned to their original unit in Brisbane.

The Solomon Islands 2004 – Second Deployment

On 24 April 2004, Jim deployed with EDD Kylie again to The Solomon Islands. His team this time included: SPR Justin Dunn and EDD Jebb, Scott Malcomson and EDD Digger and SPR Jarrod “Skins” Skinner and EDD Bolt. They flew by RAAF C130 (Hercules) transport aircraft from RAAF Amberley direct to Honiara.

The second deployment to The Solomon Islands was totally different to the first. For a starter, the accommodation had been set up in the re-built Guadalcanal Beach Resort (GBR) and the dogs had tents and runs close to the pristine beach area. There were no aircraft drowning out conversation every couple of minutes. And there was no Gun Amnesty.

There was a deployment to the Shortland Islands, a quick canoe paddle from Bougainville, but still in the Solomons archipelago. Bougainville was another hotspot for illegal activity but Jim’s team had no charter to enter Bougainville and did not step ashore there. The dog teams visited the outer islands of the Solomons and searched numerous villages along the archipelago. The dogs were used to search many houses which had been identified as suspicious by the intelligence community and to demonstrate a Show of Force to any potential rebels who might be thinking about mounting some kind of illegal action

The tempo of activity on this rotation was heavier compared to 2003. The operations were controlled principally by 5/7 RAR and one of their responsibilities was the protection of the AFP and the New Zealand Police. EDD teams were often deployed with infantry sections as well as police patrols. Although there were no significant finds of illegal arms, ammunition or explosives, the dog teams provided a rapid search capability which saved a considerable amount of search time when compared to using infantry and police resources.

The deployment ended in August 2004, when Jim brought his EDD team back to Brisbane on board a commercial air carrier. The dogs were quarantined at Eastern Creek near Sydney for 30 days and then returned to their original units in Brisbane and Townsville.

Afghanistan 2008. Jim went on to serve in Afghanistan in 2008. Jim's Afghanistan combat profile can be read as Profile No. 9 in Series 4 under the "Combat Profiles" tab above.

Discharge, Re-engagement and the IRR

Jim left the ARA and worked for the Customs Department in the Marine Unit for a few months before he missed his 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.

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 411 Kylie

Kylie was "coaxed" into service in mid 2000. She was found as a stray wandering the streets of Wattle Grove NSW by RAE dog handlers who noticed her pestering the children in the suburb. They also noticed that she had an extremely high retrieve drive

whilst playing. When the kids said the dog was un-owned she found her way into the back of the EDD "fridge truck" (dog vehicle). Subsequent microchip swipes and lost dog flyer drives failed to find her owner. But, given her early convincing successes for EDD testing, she was soon on her way to becoming an Australian Army Engineer EDD.

Given the operational tempo of the Olympics, Kylie spent 8 months as a TD (Training Dog yet to commence formal training) at the SME kennels. When Jim commenced his Supervisors Course in Feb 2001, Kylie was allocated to Jim for her course proper. Over the next 19 weeks she completed the course.

Operations:

2002 – Commonwealth Heads Of Government with Jim Hoy.

2002 - AFP operations in Canberra (details restricted) with Jim Hoy.

- 4 July US Embassy in Canberra searches (terror threat) with Jim Hoy.

2003 - OP Anode (Solomon Islands) with Jim Hoy.

2004 - OP Anode with Jim Hoy.

2006 - Commonwealth Games with LCPL Adam Exelby.

2006 - 2007 - RTF 1 Afghanistan with LCPL Adam Exelby.

Kylie retired in 2008 at 10 years of age. She currently resides with CPL Exelby in Sydney NSW as his much loved family dog. Kylie performed the duty of "ring bearer" at Adam's wedding in 2010.



EDD 411 Kylie. Image courtesy of Jim Hoy 2010.



CPL Jim Hoy gives EDD Kylie a drink of water, Solomon Islands 2003. Image courtesy of Jim Hoy 2010.



EDD Kylie being lowered into shore party inflatable craft. Solomon Islands 2004. Image courtesy of Jim Hoy 2010.