

## **Interview with War Dog Operatives**

©

Series 3, Profile 6 – East Timor

### **Corporal David Wells – Royal Australian Corps of Military Police**

Dateline for this profile is 10 December 2009.

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#### **Background**

Corporal (CPL) David Wells was born, bred and educated in Hobart, Tasmania. On leaving School, David became a qualified chef, working in restaurants for about six years. In 1989 David joined the Army Reserve (Ares) and after attending his recruit course at Brighton Army Camp, Tasmania, he served with the 12<sup>th</sup>/40<sup>th</sup> Independent Rifle Company for about two years. In 1991, he was posted to 111<sup>th</sup> Combat Supply Platoon until June 1995 when David transferred to the Australian Regular Army (ARA). David was allocated to the Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps (RAAOC) and completed his Initial Employment Training (IET) graduating as a Storeman Technical. He was posted to the 3 Brigade Administrative Support Battalion (3 BASB) in Townsville and served there until 2000. David was promoted to CPL and posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment (2 Cav Regt) where he served as the acting B Squadron Quarter Master Sergeant.

David served his time and elected discharge from the ARA. He returned to Hobart and re-joined the Ares and was posted into the 111<sup>th</sup> Combat Supply Platoon. David joined the Tasmanian Corrective Services and worked in the prison system for two years. He Corps transferred to the Ares Military Police (MP) unit in Hobart. In April 2003, David re-joined the ARA as a CPL in the MP and attended the three month basic MP course in Sydney. On graduation, David was posted to 13 MP Pl in Townsville.

In 2005, David was deployed to Iraq.

#### **Iraq**

David's job in Iraq included personal protection duties for Australian diplomats and high profile personnel. His team was responsible for protective security around the Embassy compound and also when travelling through the red and green zones. David's deployment was from June 2005 to March 2006. He did not deploy to Iraq with a dog. On his return to Australia (RTA), David was posted to the Army recruit training facility, Kapooka that is located in Wagga Wagga, NSW.

## **MP Dog Unit**

David remained at Kapooka for twelve months and succeeded in transferring to the military working dog (MWD) stream. In 2007, he attended the basic dog training course at the MP School at Holsworthy near Sydney and was then posted to the MP Dog Platoon at Oakey in Queensland. David was teamed up with Military Police Dog (MPD) Maximus. After a period of continuation training David and Maximus prepared for deployment to East Timor (ET) by joining the 3 RAR Battle Group, and conducting further training in both Sydney and Townsville.

## **East Timor**

In 2008, David and Maximus together with CPL Jeremiah Gibb and his MPD Zac departed Darwin bound for East Timor. On arrival in Dili they were received by their MP compatriots and settled into the kennel area located at the heli-pod. SGT Dean Hedberg was the MP Defence liaison officer in charge of the dog detachment.

The duties at the time included having dog teams on standby with the Quick Reaction Force (QRF), supporting the Australian and New Zealanders (Kiwis) on their infantry patrols and providing general security duties for the heli-pod. The MP dog teams were often located with the Kiwis for a week at a time, on a rotational basis. The patrols included checking streets and roads as well as movement through the surrounding bush area in-order to provide security for the locals against possible civil unrest.

During the day patrols, the personnel were involved in “meet and greet” activity with the local people. David’s Dog, Maximus was not the most social of animals and the Timorese were apprehensive about large dogs, so David and Maximus would remain at a polite distance from the meet and greet activity,

Things were totally different for night patrols, in David’s words: “The Curfew commenced at 2200 hrs and nobody was supposed to be on the streets after that time. This allowed the MP dogs to travel at the front of the patrol to give early warning should a person be breaking curfew and hiding in a dark area. However the gangs of youths did not universally respect the curfew and the infantry patrols encountered them almost every night. Quite often, we would patrol along a street or road and we would hear a commotion up ahead. As we would approach the group of people, they would be shouting and waving their arms about in an excited manner. We simply walked up to them and asked them to stop shouting and go home, as the dog was out the front of the patrol, the Timorese would shy away and become more compliant with the directions being given by the patrol commander. The dogs were respected and most Timorese preferred not to become involved in confrontations with the security forces when dogs were present. This was handy during loud arguments or potential violence. The people would apologise and say things like “yes sir, sorry sir” and then move off as directed”.

David and Maximus served for six months in ET and in 2009, returned to Australia (RTA).

## **Decompression**

The RTA flight was by chartered civil air from Dili to Darwin and then on to Sydney. The dogs were taken to the AQIS station at Eastern Creek where they remained for thirty days before being released back to duty with the MPD Pl at Oakey.

On return to work at Oakey, newly returned personnel undergo a “decompression” phase. This entails reporting for duty for half days during the first week of duty. During this time the soldier completes any medical and psychological matters that may need to be addressed. This is followed by a period of post-deployment leave, and in David’s case, he added another week of annual recreational leave to that and coincided his return to full duties at the same time as Maximus returned to the MPD Pl.

## **Oakey**

In addition to the security duties at the Army Aviation Base at Oakey, David and Maximus were engaged on exercises and demonstrations to troops at Kapooka, Canungra, Wide Bay and Canberra.

In 2010, David has been listed to attend his subject courses for the rank of Sergeant and he hopes to be promoted to Sergeant by the end of 2010. If this happens, he is very likely to continue for another two years in the MPD Pl. Alternatively David may be posted in to a non-dog posting. On the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009 David received his Military Service Medal with a five year Rosette for twenty years service in the ADF and would like to stay in the dog stream for as long as he can. David is a single supporting parent and has his ten year old son at home. David’s parents are a retired couple who live in Toowoomba and they help David to care for his son. David’s son wants to be like Dad and eventually join the Army. Dave was promoted to Sergeant in early 2010 and continued to serve with the MP Dog Platoon during that year.

## **Maximus**

On 2 September 2010, Maximus succumbed to progressive degenerative disease in his hind quarter and was euthanized.

Good boy Maximus, you served our Nation well.



Cpl David Wells and MPD Maximus. Image courtesy of Dave Wells 2008.



Cpl David Wells and MPD Maximus patrolling the streets in Dili, East Timor, 2008. Image courtesy of Dave Wells 2008.



Cpl David Wells and Maximus in support of New Zealanders in East Timor, 2008. Image courtesy of Dave Wells, 2008.



Cpl David Wells gives Maximus a drink of water, Dili, East Timor, 2008. Image courtesy of Dave Wells, 2008.



Cpl David Wells and Maximus patrol the heli-pod, East Timor, 2008. Image courtesy of Dave Wells, 2008.



Military Police Dog (MPD) Maximus, 2008. Image courtesy of Dave Wells, 2008.