

EDD HARRY-

His story, from trial to tribulation and back again via San Diego.

By Corporal Joshua Collbourne, RAE.

In late December 2008, I first met Harry in Sydney handing over some trained and not so trained EDD over to the then chief trainer, Sgt Damien Dunne. I was due to deploy to Afghanistan for a short period of time in 2009 and was on the look out for an operational EDD. The EDD I was teamed up with at that time, Tuska, after search training and assessments, was never going to make the grade as an operational EDD. When I first met Harry, I could see that he was fit, quick and possessed a good nose. I only had the one search with him in Sydney and he absolutely smashed it. Running all over the area, searching the whole time and hitting the kit hard. To me, Harry seemed good to go as my reteam partner and after satisfying further deployment requirements, Harry and I were all set. Little did I know what was to follow.

Back in my home base in Brisbane, I was on stand down leave and trying to conduct training for Harry proved a challenge. The original plan for training area allocation and staff available to sign out equipment, all fell through. Staff saying that they would help out but not delivering on their promises, became too hard and Harry and I were pretty disappointed with the lack of help. During this time however, interesting things started to happen. Other handlers, senior and junior, started to ring asking why I had chosen Harry. All those phone calls had a similar emphasis and I was totally surprised by the questions which included: "Why in the world would you take a dog that had failed basic training two times?" "You realise Harry hasn't searched in over 6 months!" "You know Harry can't even do a route search! He hasn't even been ops' assessed!" "Have you tried getting him in a car? He freaks out when he gets near them. Let alone searching them!" As this information began to dawn on me I thought back to Sydney and what had happened there. I had been disappointed with several people and the games that they appeared to be playing. But, I knew full well where I was about to go and what I was doing. I decided to buck up and get on with the job. Which Harry and I did.

Harry and I left Brisbane for the arse end of the world again, this being my second tour to Afghanistan and Harry's first. We transited for a short period of time in Kuwait. The kennels there consisted of a cut off crate on wood. I'm not one to complain but you would think after 5 years in Afghanistan, the Force Insertion Team would have acted on our request to build proper holding kennels. I guess there isn't enough time in the day with all that coffee and Hungry Jacks to be consumed and every one knows that it takes time to fill out the apps for both campaign medals for Iraq and Afghanistan. Dogs? Too low on the priority list. From there we arrived in the Tarin Kowt (TK) Bowl ready for a fun and exciting Tour with professional soldiers and Leaders who were ready to fight the fight with Terror.

On arriving at TK, I was required to conduct an Ops assessment before heading out on patrol. This was achieved with great difficulty with Harry's past experience. But never the less, the boxes were ticked and we were set to go. The majority of the tour was spent outside the wire. Mainly concentrating in the Baluchi/Chora region. My Tour included small contacts and large full on battles. The highlight of these being the battle at SBF Rabbit. The name would be changed later to SBF Courage. The former being named after the Dutch "tactical withdrawal to the rear" Jap style back to TK. We stitched up a lot of Taliban fighters and a good day was had by all - apart from the Taliban. Over this period Harry must have taken a moment to himself and listened to one of the many talks I had with him.

He went from just someone's pet dog to a great EDD. This was mainly due to the high quantity of searching that was conducted, his fitness levels improved and most importantly, because of the time I spent with him, we had developed a great bond between us. At the end of the Tour, Harry had grown on me and we were quite a team. His searching was up there with the best. From the beginning of this Tour to its end we wanted to stay and fight the fight. The end of the Tour came quickly enough, but we would be back in TK again later.

On return to Brisbane, Harry had some time off and then got stuck back into it. Let's just say a lot of people were impressed with him. He was smashing all the search areas and hitting all target scents. He was also doing the commands given by hand signal with out voice. So I was pretty happy with him. After word got out about Harry, I started to receive some phone calls from other handlers asking if they could have EDD Harry. I was amazed about that fact alone, but I was told I was going on course and had no need for him. Firstly, I wasn't even aware I was going on course and secondly, the phone calls came from some of the original handlers that didn't want him to start with. Things never cease to amaze me. But never the less, EDD Harry aka the H-Bomb was mine and I could not be happier. Besides being a great EDD he had an amazing character. He is probably the best looking dog the stream has ever had. I think he knew this and was a typical ladies man. He had the uncanny ability to sniff out a lovely lady and head straight over to her for a pat. Playing the part of being the tough army dog war vet, he would lose his mind and carry on like a romantic cavalier in front of the Ladies. I started to think that Harry was only happy to have me around the ladies because it made him better looking. But I will never know.

That time of year came around and pre-deployment training for Afghanistan was conducted. The lack of time in training was disappointing to say the least and all the EDD's went backwards in their standards. This training shortfall would be picked up in Afghanistan. Harry arrived in January 2010 for a long nine month tour. During this time Harry proved to be a great asset to the EDD section, the Squadron and the Battle Group. With large amounts of caches and IED's located in the battle area, his services were in high demand. Patrol commanders would fight to have him at their bases and work with him. A great satisfaction would come when narrow minded leaders would state that there was no need for EDD's in Afghanistan, then later that day on the same patrol, he would capture large amounts of explosive material, all attributed to the capability of the EDD. Harry would also be present during some huge battles and contacts, that are not about to be forgotten anytime soon. If you look hard enough you can see him in some media release footage in some of these actions. Some people in the chain of command tried to tell me that Harry was just another "tool" of search. They just didn't get it. He was and is a friend, a mate, a companion, a best friend and someone who was there every day and going through what I went through. He was there by my side every day, through the good days, the great days and the worst days I ever had. More importantly, he was there for all the boys. During bad times he would a source of humour, courage and mateship.

During high stress times, when the atmosphere could be cut with a knife, he would see fit to start dry humping commanders for an extra bit of affection, or on a long hard patrol returning with a chicken in his mouth for some late night supper. Or, when he would see fit to help himself to the local food when doing a compound search. He always had a thing for the local cats and got some kills up of his own on his Tour. At times, I would counsel him on his behaviour and address some keys point that he needed to review to improve his soldierly qualities to maintain the standard befitting an Australian Sapper in the RAE. But, looking back he was just doing what we all have done for those that have served as an Aussie Digger. He pushed the boundaries, made light of every situation and always

thought there was some time for a bit a fun. Never took himself too seriously and was always there for his mates. From doing something that would leave us in hysterics to being there by your side when the times were tough. He would always have his spot near the fire reserved by all the boys out at the outpost. Even the toughest and heavily tattooed guys would have a soft spot for him.

After a long and eventful Tour for all the EDDs including Harry, it was time to come home for a well deserved rest. All the final medical checks and forms were signed and off they went to AQIS for a bit a final R&R. This was always the case on returning home to Australia and nothing more was thought of it. While on leave I received a devastating phone call and it changed everything. An AQIS vet informed me that EDD Harry had contracted a blood virus and would not be accepted into Australia. Even though he was showing no signs of the virus, they could not determine whether it was his antibodies or the virus itself for which he was returning a positive test. I listened to the news with anguish and sadness. Devastating news that would have huge ramifications for Harry and me, some good, a lot bad. After the initial shock and investigation, AQIS's recommendation had to be followed. EDD Harry would never enter Australia alive. Although upset, the professionalism and dedication they showed Harry was without question. Their commitment was exemplary and the compassion they showed Harry was amazing. He was in good care, great care in fact. To tell the truth I was extremely angry with myself for letting this happen. Happen to my best mate who had done nothing wrong. Dr Jill, along with all the girls at AQIS, would become great friends because without her professionalism, dedication and heart felt care, things would have gone horribly wrong for Harry.

In this part of the story I am going to leave out a bit of information in relation to coming up with a solution for Harry. This is mainly due to the degree of dissatisfaction I felt with the management of Harry's case by the authorities at that time. One night in July, I received a phone call from an angel in Afghanistan called Narelle Jensz. Narelle was working in Afghanistan as a Federal Police Officer training local Afghan recruits to become skilled, motivated and drug free graduates in the art of policing in Afghanistan. But to my surprise this was not her passion. Her real passion was rescuing civilian dogs that had been injured and hurt by the locals and also caring for the un-official mascots at the patrol bases throughout Afghanistan. She was also working with a charity called the Now Zad Animal shelter in Kabul. Providing them with medical care, training, feeding and other important projects for their animals. Her commitment to the local dogs was amazing. To me she was the last chance of finding a solution for Harry. And, as she promised, so she delivered.

Through her work rescuing and saving the local dogs she came in contact with some families that would be happy to adopt Harry in the USA. The USA is one of only a few countries that allow dogs with his disease to enter. When I mean she found a suitable home I mean she took them through a rigorous selection process including reference checks, questionnaire for suitability test and an interview including a contract written up stating the ongoing needs and desires of EDD Harry. Without Narelle, Harry would be either put down in AQIS, or, someone suggested that they could give him to the ANA to use as a search dog. I was against such a suggestion because I was not convinced that the ANA would look after Harry as well as I had done.

From the initial checks, two families were short listed as candidates to adopt Harry. The proud new owner was Seth Stone, a very distinguished LT. Col Navy Seal who lives in San Diego. At the time of selection, Seth was still on active duty in Afghanistan completing one of many of his combat tours. I could probably write two pages on this man and his

accomplishments but let's just say Harry is in safe hands. Also I am a little bit jealous. The forms were signed and the bills paid at the last minute and Harry was on his way. He left behind a lot of broken hearts and good memories. The ladies at AQIS had developed a huge soft spot to say the least and a few tears were shed when he departed. Even RAE Cpl Joel Toms had to be comforted and reassured during Harry's last moments in Australia. Let's just say it was like a 9 year old girl who had just had her pony put down. Dramatic and amazing that a grown man would weep for a dog like that. I had to hold my emotion down as Harry left in a transporter for the airport, but as I tell my 4 year old son. Big boys don't cry. We bottle it up and tried not to let it fester into depression.

At this very moment, two old army vets are on a beach somewhere in San Diego, having a walk, sharing some stories, enjoying the water and the peace. Or even sitting on a couch watching TV, not saying anything just enjoying each other's company. Harry would be there looking up at Seth with that look he always gave me. The reassuring look of mateship and friendship. That look that no matter what you do, say or think, he will always be there for you. Good times and bad. No matter how bad the day has been, just being your mate is good enough. No more heat, dust, noisy chopper rides, crummy food, loud and angry battles and constant searching. Just good times ahead with a good mate.

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August 2011