

Interviews with War Dog Operatives

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Series 2, Profile 1 – Somalia

Sapper Seamus Doherty – Royal Australian Engineers

Dateline for this profile is 03 December 2009.

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Background

Sapper (Spr) Seamus Doherty was born, raised and educated in Perth, Western Australia. He left school at the age of seventeen and worked for a short period as machine operator followed by technical work in a soils laboratory. His work was associated with providing an assay of amounts of gold, silver and other minerals sent to the laboratory for analysis by mining and exploration companies. Seamus always wanted to be a soldier, particularly a sapper, and so in October 1986, he joined the Army Reserve's (ARes) 13 Field Squadron RAE based at Karrakatta in Perth. He attended the ARes recruit training course at Leuwin Barracks near Fremantle and his Initial Employment Training (IET) for RAE through the ARes system at Karrakatta. On 1st March 1988, Seamus enlisted into the Australian Regular Army (ARA).

In those days the ARes system was not dovetailed into the ARA recruit training process as it is today, and so Seamus had to attend a recruit course at the 1st Recruit Training Battalion at Kapooka, followed by another IET at the School of Military Engineering (SME) at Moorebank near Sydney. Seamus graduated from 1 RTB with the award of "most outstanding soldier" in his platoon. On graduation from his IET, he remained at SME and was employed on the construction of a Bailey Bridge across the George's River, which the Department of Defence gifted to the people of Liverpool.

Seamus was posted to the 20th Divisional Engineer Support Squadron (20 Div) in Brisbane as a field engineer and then qualified as a driver and drove the 5-7 tonne cargo (Mack) trucks for about three years. He was interested in explosive detection dogs (EDD) when he passed through SME on his IET, but was told that he needed at least three years in a field unit before he could apply to go to the EDD Section at SME. Having done his three years, he applied, was interviewed by Sergeant Colin "Smiley" Matthews, and informed that the next dog handlers course was not scheduled to commence for another eighteen months. Disheartened by this, Seamus served on, and decided to discharge from the Army when his time was due. He submitted his discharge papers at the appropriate time and was then told by his Squadron Sergeant Major that he had been nominated to attend the upcoming EDD course at SME. Seamus almost ran to the Orderly Room, pulled his discharge out of the system, and immediately applied for the EDD course. In February 1991, Seamus arrived at SME to undertake his training as an EDD handler.

At that time, RAE had thirty dogs and sixteen dog handlers at SME under the control of Smiley Matthews. There were two dog teams each in the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment (1 CER) at Holsworthy and 3 CER in Townsville. Seamus graduated as an EDD dog

handler, and a short time later, became a dog trainer under the watchful eye of Smiley Matthews. During this period, Seamus was teamed-up with EDD Mick. 3 CER needed a dog team and Seamus volunteered for the job and shortly afterward, both he and Mick were posted to 3 CER in Townsville.

In December of 1992, the situation in Somalia had seriously deteriorated, the United States Marine Corps (USMC) had been deployed and the Non Government Organisations (NGO) were experiencing difficulties with the collapse of the government. War lords were traumatising the local population and Somalia was becoming a “failed state” very quickly. They needed military help to restore law and order and to get the system of aid and administrative services re-established. Australia agreed to send a contingent and mobilised its Operational Deployment Force (ODF) based at Townsville to respond. Seamus and Mick were a part of the ODF.

Seamus and Mick received a week and a half of deployment training and briefings in Townsville before they departed for Somalia in January 1993 by QANTAS air charter. The EDD capability included three EDD teams. They were Seamus Doherty with EDD Mick (German Shepherd), Simon Harvey with EDD Duke (German Shepherd) and Darren Davis with EDD Tia (German Shepherd cross with possibly Kelpie).

Somalia

The dogs were transported in portable kennels on the same aircraft as the three handlers. The flight went via Singapore to Mogadishu. They arrived by day and saw a myriad of military aircraft operating around the Mogadishu airport. When the 35 sappers from 3 CER were on the ground, a Warrant Officer ordered everybody to “get down” as incoming small arms fire was being received into the airport area. Shots were fired back by the friendly security personnel, and the Captain of the QANTAS Boeing 747 cargo aircraft, got his aircraft out of there as quickly as he possibly could.

That first night, the EDD section was accommodated in a transit camp situated at the end of the runway. A slight mis-timing of the ammunition supply meant that the sappers were in position with their personal weapons, but no ammunition. In Seamus’ words “ Throughout the night, there were sounds of firing from small arms, RPGs and very frequent takeoffs and landings from heavy lift transport aircraft. It was a sleepless night. Next morning the ammunition arrived and was quickly distributed. We moved to another part of the airport where we emplaned on to United States Air Force (USAF) C 130 aircraft and flew to the Australian Area of Operations (AO) at Baidoa. We deplaned from the C 130s and they departed immediately after we deplaned. We then just stood there among some high bushes. We were on our own and waiting for someone to show up to guide us to our location. After about fifteen minutes of standing around, some United States Army trucks arrived and we were taken to the Australian camp.

At the Australian camp in Baidoa we could not see any arrangements for the kennelling of our three dogs. There were five USMC Sergeants, who were Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technicians, who had an aircraft bund as accommodation. The aircraft,

which were fully bombed up and fuelled up were standing forlorn to one side of the runway. The USMC guys had tents erected in the aircraft bays and invited us to move in with them. Our own EOD technician and the ammunition technician moved in as well, so there were five Marines together with five Aussies. The Marines had organised ISO containers for storage and security and had set themselves up very well. We were very grateful to the Americans for their generosity. But the American generosity did not stop there. A few weeks later the Marines had to go back to Mogadishu, and on departure just bequeathed the whole lot to us. The dogs had good shade but we had to keep Mick and Duke away from each other in case they might fight. It was very hot during the day where the temperature went into the high 40°C and all the water had to be carried in as bottled water”.

Rations for the dogs became an exercise in inventiveness. The EDD team were supposed to have received 25 cartons of dog food – instead they received 25 cans. It was gone in no time and so the dogs were fed on US Army combat rations. Consequently, the dogs lost a lot of condition. Local food arrangements did not work very well either. The Army system tried to buy local goats, butcher them and cook up the meat. But that was a lot of work for a little amount of meat. Dog food came on the next logistic ship, and when it did, the dog food problem was solved.

The work undertaken by the EDD teams was to support infantry patrols mainly in the town of Baidoa. These patrols of up to Company strength, would spread out through the area and provide extra protection for the international NGO aid agencies in their compounds. In addition, they would activate intelligence reports about the presence of arms and ammunition in the local houses and villages. The infantry would secure the buildings and the EDD teams would search and locate the items of interest. Seamus found it easier not to carry a rifle, and preferred his sidearm for personal protection should he ever need to use it. The dogs found a large quantity of arms, ammunition, and explosive ordnance in buildings, abandoned buildings and back yard areas. Mick was really good at finding RPG propellant charge packs.

A typical ploy of the insurgents was to mingle with the local people and then fire shots at the security forces. Having done that, they would then dump the weapons in nearby hides and re-mingle with the locals. The EDD teams would be called out at any time of the day or night, immediately after such incidents, and search for the abandoned weapons. In open areas and on roads and tracks, the system for searching was the off-leash box pattern process. Building searches were conducted using a set search procedure so that nothing was missed. But for vehicle searches, the dogs were operated as the situation dictated. There were a lot of Italian pattern hand grenades found around the area. Land mines and IED were not a big issue in the Australian AO, but there were a lot found in hides and caches. The mines were being used mainly on the border of Somalia and Ethiopia, well North of the Australian AO. Sappers did prod for mines when they supported an armoured patrol and an intelligence report indicated that mines may have been laid. Seamus left Mick behind and worked as a combat engineer. No mines were found.

The local population were of the Muslim faith, and Islam does not like animals, such as dogs, to come into contact with people or in places where they ate and slept. Some village heads would complain about this to the Australian commander in an effort to keep the EDD out of their habitats. The locals called the German Shepherds “dogs from hell”. They were so determined not to let the dogs into their houses that when the locals realised that the EDD were going to search their house and find the “stuff”, they would just dump the illegal stuff outside. If a dog touched a local, they would immediately wash themselves with sand and water. Seamus had an incident in a village – in his words: “Whenever the dogs would arrive, the locals would gather out of curiosity to see such large dogs. One day in a village it was hot and dusty, so I took a swig out of a water bottle and then I cupped my hand under it, poured water into my hand, and Mick lapped it up. The reaction to this from the locals was one of horrified disbelief. But that was the good news. It went from bad to worse when I then drank again from the water bottle, even though Mick did not touch it, the locals went into gut-wrenching disgust at me.”

The Australian Commander at the time was Colonel Bill Mellor. He wanted a police dog presence in the massive embassy compound at Mogadishu to dissuade some infiltrators who were making a nuisance of themselves. The embassy compound housed a large number of foreign Consuls-General and their staffs. Although the EDD were not trained as security dogs, they were nonetheless big dogs with sharp teeth. So, the Royal New Zealand Air Force would fly the dogs from Baidoa to Mogadishu, a distance of about 300 kms, for the dogs to perform security duties, and they were successful in that role. It provided a happy reunion for the Australian dog handlers to catch up with their five USMC mates who were housed in that compound. It also provided an opportunity for the dogs to visit the United States Army Veterinary Corps (USAVC) officer, Captain Steven Waters, who had his vet surgery there.

Back in Baidoa, the EDD teams supported 1 RAR infantry and 3/4 Cavalry Regiment armoured patrols at a place called Bahackabar, nicknamed “Little Ayers Rock”, because of its hill of rock formations. The patrols would spend seven days there disrupting the movement of the insurgents across that part of the country. The insurgents eventually abandoned that area as a safe route for their movement.

On Australia Day 1993, all troops were invited into 3/4 Cavalry Regt to receive two cans of beer to help celebrate the Day. EDD Mick’s name was on the nominal roll, so Seamus asked for Mick’s ration of beer along with his own. The Cavalry Warrant Officer (WO) was not amused and asked where the dog was located. Seamus answered that he was back in the dog compound. The WO knocked back Mick’s beer ration on the grounds that he was not present to receive it. Seamus remembered that. On ANZAC Day, the same issue of beer was allowed. This time Seamus took Mick with him. Same WO, same circumstances. The WO refused Mick his two beers. In disgust Seamus left, but in exercising Mick he allowed him to run off lead. Mick found the cavalry monument with its silver ensign of a scorpion, and its decoration for an ANZAC Day memorial service, cocked his leg and pissed all over the silver scorpion. There was an immediate reaction. The Cavalry guys wanted a piece of Seamus and his dog, but the infantry guys warned

them that if one hand was raised against the sapper or his dog, there was going to be big trouble anytime soon. Seamus and Mick escaped unscathed.

The tour of duty went for four and a half months and the drama about putting the dogs down became acute. There was a lot of public debate in the Australian media along with a cost value exercise about the cost of training replacement dogs compared to paying for quarantine through the United Kingdom (UK). The outcome was that the dogs would not be put down and that Defence would pay for the dogs to go through the full quarantine process before being admitted back into Australia. The Australian EDD were helped significantly by the assistance of Captain Waters USAVC, who reported that the Australian dogs had been maintained at a high standard of veterinary care, and then wrote a letter of commendation about the way in which the Australian soldiers had maintained their dogs' health and well being. The dogs were transported to Kenya from Mogadishu with Darren Davis looking after them. They then went from Kenya to the UK where they remained for seven months in quarantine. They travelled back to Australia and spent a further two months in quarantine at Eastern Creek in the Sydney area. Mick and Tia continued on as EDD in 3 CER under control of Seamus and Darren. Duke was gifted to an Australian Ordnance Corps female WO because of his age related issues.

Back in Australia

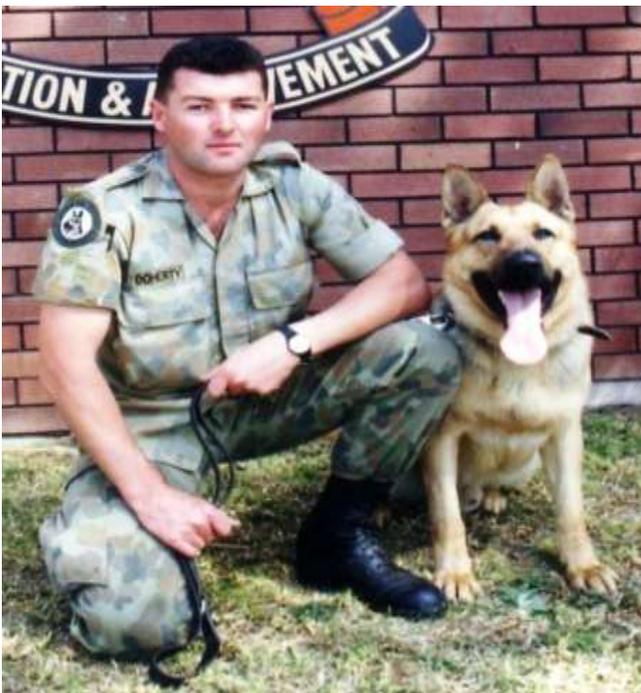
Seamus returned to 3 CER in Townsville and served out his time and discharged from the ARA. Mick was re-teamed with sapper David James who took Mick to Bougainville in The Solomon Islands during the conflict in that area. Tia also served in The Solomon Islands with sapper Brendan Johnson.

In September 1994, Seamus left the ARA and returned to his home town in Perth and worked in security companies operating in general security duties. He enlisted in the Ready Reserve in 1994 and served with 2 CER until January 1996. Seamus served with the ARes 13 Fd Sqn at Karrakatta in WA from January 1996 to December 1997 and transferred to the Pilbara Regiment and served there until April 2001.

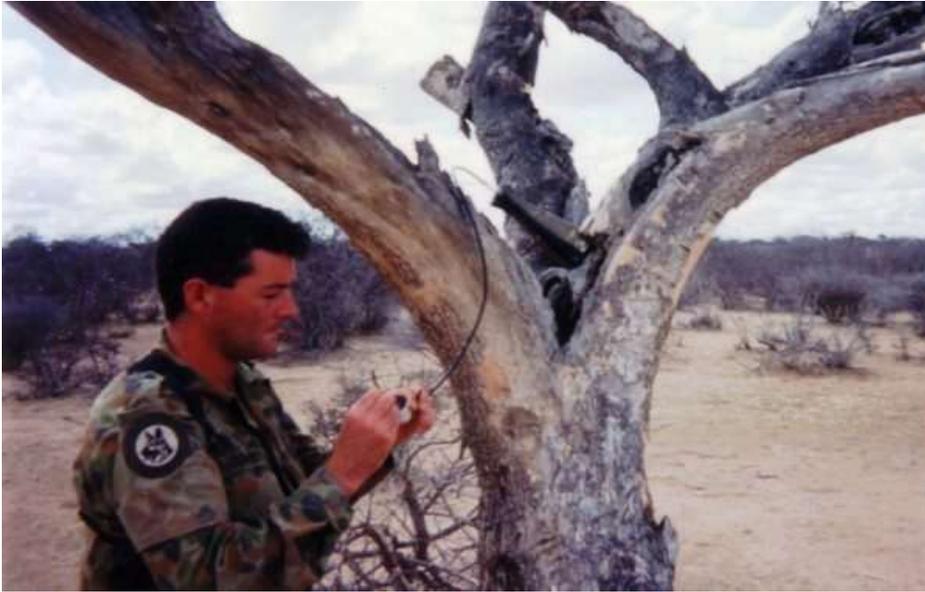
In 1997, Seamus joined the Western Australia Police including forensic and bomb scene examining duties. He has many Police qualifications including bomb appraisal and bomb technician as well as working with the WA Police bomb squad. Seamus is stationed in Australind near Bunbury at this time and holds the rank of Senior Constable and continues in the Police stream, including general duties. Seamus is married and lives in a park land environment near Australind.



Sapper Seamus Doherty and EDD Mick perform a vehicle search at an impromptu Vehicle Check Point (VCP). Note the Unimog in the background acting as a “cut-off”. Somalia 1993.



SPR Seamus Doherty and EDD Mick at the Navy Police Dog Section in 1992



Sapper Seamus Doherty acting as a Combat Engineer destroying captured explosives, arms and ammunition. Somalia 1993.



Silhouette of EDD and handler (Seamus and Mick). Somalia 1993.



ANZAC Day 1993 at 3/4 Cavalry Regiment, Baidoa – the day Mick “did the unspeakable” on the Cavalry Scorpion. Somalia 1993.



DM 334 Explosive Detection Dog Mick.