

## **Interviews with War Dog Operatives**

Series 3, Profile 2 – East Timor

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### **Warrant Officer Robert Jennings OAM: Royal Australian Air Force**

Dateline for this profile is 14 November 2009.

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#### **Background**

Warrant Officer (WO) Robert (Bob) Jennings OAM was born and christened in the Betoota Hotel near Birdsville in 1946. It was the only building in the area, at that time, and was used for any purpose that the bush people saw fit. Bob's primary schooling was mainly via "school of the air" and his secondary schooling was more traditional in the Adelaide area. Bob left school at the age of fourteen and managed to get a job with a rural employment company, albeit he had to do some inventive parental consent documentation to get it. He was assigned a rural station at Mount Clarence in the Coober Pedy area of South Australia, and worked as a stockman. After twelve months he decided to move on and worked as a stockman for the next two years on various stations. Bob returned to Adelaide and worked in a brickyard became a married man, but then decided to take his family into the rural area of Victoria. In 1977, an RAAF recruiting van caught Bob's attention because it advertised the need for dog handlers to be recruited into the Air Force. Bob signed up.

Bob completed his recruit training at 1 Recruit Training Unit at the RAAF Base at Edinburg in South Australia. Bob's dog training course was conducted at 7 Stores Depot (7 SD) in Toowoomba and he graduated from that ten week course as the honour student. On graduation Bob and his dog PD Hobo, were posted to RAAF Base Fairbairn in Canberra. Bob was promoted to Leading Aircraftman (LAC), and on completing their posting of two years Bob and Hobo were posted to Singapore.

#### **RAAF Base Tengah in Singapore**

The RAAF took over areas of this base after the Royal Air Force had departed and handed the base over the Republic of Singapore Air Force. There were areas where Australian security interests required Australian surveillance and protective measures such as Mirage and F111 aircraft. The Australian flight line was exclusively patrolled, at night, by a RAAF security dog and handler. In those days, the handler was armed with a Browning 9 mm pistol and twenty rounds of ammunition, he had no radio and no immediate backup. Their area of responsibility included the flight line, headquarters buildings and any mission critical sheds which were nominated for security purposes. There was an outer perimeter of security provided by the Singapore Armed Forces, and they did this work in a very professional manner. This meant that the work for the RAAF dog teams during Bob two years there recorded no incidents of a security nature. However, poor Hobo had an encounter with a Cobra snake, and although Hobo ate the snake, he had been bitten at least sixteen times by the Cobra and he died as a result of

venomous poisoning. Bob re-teamed with an ex-Royal Australian Navy dog, PD Rebel. Rebel had a history of being a typical alpha male and had put his handlers in hospital with severe bite wounds. It took a long time and a lot of dog savvy for Bob to win Rebel over. Bob and Rebel became the top man/dog team on that Base. When Bob rotated out of Singapore in 1983, he challenged the system to bring Rebel back to Australia, but the expense and quarantine restrictions prohibited that. Rebel was put down. It was cold comfort for Bob to be promoted to Corporal (CPL) just prior to returning to Australia (RTA).

### **RTA and 2 SD in Sydney**

Bob was posted to RAAF Base Amberley near Brisbane Qld, and was assigned as the Duty Security Controller (Duties) and the Training NCO. This included training personnel who had been posted into the security dog muster at RAAF Amberley. He remained in this position for four years.

Bob was promoted to Sergeant and posted to 2 SD in Sydney as the section Commander in 1988. Bob was in charge of two Corporals and ten LACs plus fourteen dogs. There were several incidents where Bob's Section supported the NSW Police on law enforcement duties. This started after an incident where a NSW policeman was attacked by an offender with a pinch bar and then tried to escape through the 2 SD compound. But he ran straight into the jaws of a RAAF Security Guard's dog and apprehended. The policeman actually had a police dog in his van, but decided not to take him when he was attacked. The NSW police were very grateful and a long and useful affiliation commenced between both dog oriented units. Bob reviewed what had happened that night and initiated a new facet of RAAF dog work he called "high impact dog teams". He cleared the idea with his Commanding Officer (CO) and trained his troops in the management of hostage rescue situations.

Bob's personnel were very enthusiastic about this training and produced excellent results. The NSW Police contributed to the training by providing hostage scenario personnel and realistic training situations for the RAAF dog teams. Then one day a person with a distinctive military presence about himself arrived at 2 SD to run an evaluation of the high impact dog team capability. He was important, but nobody was allowed to salute him or call him "Sir". But a "Sir" he surely was. He set up a series of five evaluations based on Northern Ireland hostage situations and challenged Bob's teams to respond. They came through the evaluations with a 100% success rate. "Sir" asked for Bob's training regime and supporting documents which he took away with him. Shortly afterwards, Bob was informed that he had been successfully nominated for the Honour of "Order of Australia Medal" (OAM). He was invested with the OAM in 1989.

Shortly after this Bob was promoted to Flight Sergeant and posted back to RAAF Amberley.

## **Big Changes in the Dog Muster**

When Bob arrived back in Amberley he found that enormous establishment changes were about to be made. The most significant of these was the amalgamation of the RAAF Service Police (SP) muster with the Security Guard muster. Bob was placed in charge of the Section and this was not a welcome outcome for the Service Police. But they made it work. Dog handlers received conversion course training into the SP muster and some SP were selected to receive dog training. Bob had a few attitude problems with some personnel wanting to resist change. So, Bob organised a team-building exercise, authorised it through his CO and sent groups of SP and dog teams into the bush to live together under combat conditions with objectives to achieve. This included urban operations, night raids, navigation exercises and a host of group problem solving exercises. The outcome was successful and the unit began to operate as a team regardless of their original muster. Bob continued in this posting at the rank of Flight Sergeant for about two years. By now Bob had qualified as a Service Policeman.

Bob posted on to Darwin in the early 1990s and became involved in many Base defence exercises. The “enemy” included 3 RAR, Recon elements and ADGs. The RAAF dog teams detected all attempts to enter the area and established themselves as an essential part of the inventory of security for the Base.

There was an incident involving two thrill kill murderers (Baker and Hice) who had escaped from Berrima Prison and had the NT Police in pursuit. The NT Police Tactical Response Group asked for RAAF MWD support, and after some local agreements had been firmed-up, the RAAF dog teams were added to the search effort. The trail was by now 48 hours old. However, a lady living in the Darwin area had suffered an illegal entry and she identified Baker as the culprit. Despite a large amount of contamination in the immediate vicinity of the house, the MWD team picked up a trail about 50 metres away from it and began tracking the suspect and eventually arrived at the community dump. The fugitives had made fish traps and other devices to survive in this area. The search continued and the outcome was the successful re-capture of both criminals.

In 1995, the Provost Marshal of the Air Force (PM (AF)) conducted an assessment of the value of MWD to RAAF Base security. His unstated aim was to try to remove this muster from the RAAF inventory of security assets. He was invited to conduct a test of the MWD capability in Darwin. He accepted, and set up a series of tests for which he expected the MWD teams to fail. They did not. In fact they passed every test, clearly. He challenged that if every MWD team in the RAAF could work as well as the Darwin team, then the dogs would stay. But, he wanted Bob to head up the project team which would develop the same capability throughout the RAAF. As an incentive, Bob was promoted to Warrant Officer.

Bob commenced his PM (AF) project in January 1996 realising that if he could not prove a war capability for the MWD, that would be the end of the line for the muster in the

RAAF. He was allocated a workspace in the Security, Fire and Security School at Amberley and left to his own devices. There were no initial Terms of Reference (TOR)). However, twelve months into the project, Bob had a chance to prove the value of MWD teams. A Base exercise was planned where intruders would be pre-located as a test for the speed and accuracy of the dogs. It proved to be too easy. So a harder task was selected at the RAAF Purga rifle range. Snipers were positioned in camouflaged hides. It again, proved to be too easy. The RAAF management level was beginning to see the value of the dogs and attitudes were on the change in favour of the MWD muster. The project was now elevated to a Chief of Air Force (CAF) project. Now the TOR was clear. What was the role of the MWD in war? Bob was designated as “Director” of the project which allowed him to directly liaise with other government Departments, such as the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS). He worked with AQIS in Canberra and forged the capability for military dogs to move from and to Australia. Bob had not forgotten Rebel in Singapore. The outcome was a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ADF (initially just RAAF) and AQIS which involved a series of maintenance protocols all of which would produce written documentation allowing an AQIS inspector to be satisfied that a MWD returning to Australia from an overseas conflict would be quarantined for one month at the AQIS quarantine facility at Eastern Creek near Sydney, before being allowed to return to full duties on Australian soil. The project continued until 2000 and with its work done and the MWD capability now a permanent feature of RAAF Base security, the muster continued without further challenge.

The impact of the success of the MOU with AQIS can not be understated. Up until this time, dogs posted overseas were left behind in the country where they operated. The Australian war dogs of Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Singapore and Vietnam did not come home due to the strict AQIS regulations – which still apply to this day. The three explosive detection dogs (EDD) sent to Somalia did come home, but only after lengthy and costly quarantine stays in England and Australia. The new MOU was a benchmark in saving the lives of MWD working in East Timor, The Solomon Islands and Afghanistan. It also allowed our MWD to return to duty very quickly after leaving a conflict area.

### **East Timor – 1<sup>st</sup> Deployment**

The order to move to East Timor (ET) came at short notice. The Amberley Squadron was on stand-by and the OC identified the need for eight dog teams to go to ET. Bob selected his teams, arranged for all veterinary and administrative actions to be completed quickly and moved his dog teams to Townsville by road. On the way to Townsville, Bob received eight telephone calls on his mobile phone from the Air Force Police community, including his “old mate” the PM (AF), telling him that the MWD were not to go to ET and that he should return to Amberley. Bob was told that he would be arrested at the gates of RAF Base Townsville if he did not comply with the order (the call was heard by all the dog handlers on the bus, because Bob held up the phone and put it on loudspeaker). Bob did not comply with the order to return to Amberley. Instead, he referred the issue to his OC, arrived in Townsville and received no further contact from the Air Force Police community.

This was the first deployment of MWD to ET. There was no MWD related intelligence available, the dog teams were travelling with light scale equipment and trusted that the “system” would bring the combat scale up to speed when they arrived at the base in ET. It was more hope than expectation, because things were moving fast and the MWD logistic plan had not been finalised by the time they arrived in ET.

Bob’s team flew by RAAF C130 aircraft direct from Townsville to the Commoro airport in Dili. The approach to Commoro was tactical and the personnel on board were ordered to load their weapons and go to “Action” (a bullet in the chamber) in case they needed to fight as soon as they deplaned on the ground.

As soon as the aircraft came to a halt, the personnel and MWD deplaned, and what they saw stunned them. In Bob’s words: “The destruction of buildings and facilities by the Militia and Indonesian Forces was absolute. Nothing was left standing. We had no recognisable area in which to consolidate our arrival and organise our teams into combat readiness. It was hot and humid and the place had the distinct aroma of the tropics. We moved to the side of the airfield, away from other units, staked the dogs out on chains and organised the dog transporter boxes as kennels for the MWD. The personnel put up their hutchies (personal plastic shelter sheets), made ourselves as comfortable as we could and became immediately involved with the Surge Operations to secure the airfield. But there was a big problem looming. We could only satisfy the AQIS protocols for 48 hours and if our gear did not arrive by then, we were going to be in breach of the MOU. We needed a proper kennel area fast. We located an old, but now wrecked quarantine station near the airport and decided to locate our kennel complex in that. We had to repair almost everything including cleaning finger graffiti off the walls made from human excrement as a farewell gesture of the Indonesian Army. After a lot of hard and careful work, we transformed a smouldering ruin into what other folk called the “Taj Mahal”. My troops were god at “borrowing and swapping” and much United Nations (UN) materiel transferred itself across the tarmac and found its way into my kennel area. The tactical situation was far from comfortable. There was the odd angry shot coming from suspected Indonesian military personnel dressed as civvies and the crack and thump exercise lasted for many days. Some Indonesian military types, in uniform, were making a nuisance of themselves at the medical facility. When female staff were showering, these fellows would creep under the canvas tent walls and ogle the females. Four days after we arrived we were asked to put a stop to this invasion of privacy. So we took a couple of dog teams over to the ablution block, patrolled the area, and in addition, conducted attack training in full view of the Indonesians. The patrols identified where the Indonesians were housed, and this produced a confrontation. An Indonesian opened fire with a light machine gun – just eight or nine rounds. We deployed tactically but were restricted by lines of hospital tentage. When the Indonesians saw the Quick Response Force and my own troops manoeuvring toward them, they disappeared into their building. The subsequent investigation declared that the burst was an ‘accidental discharge’”.

The initial insertion of Australians and other international forces into ET had many close encounters that were never reported in the international press. The aim was to placate

many nations about the possibility of genocide occurring in ET and the presence of the international community there was all about satisfying this as an outcome. However, there were a small number of firefights between the international forces and Militia Forces. Another problem was the intimidation of the ET civilian population by armed Indonesian soldiers on military trucks where they would line up on one side of a truck, cock their weapons and then point them at the civilians. This would cause immediate panic and the civilians would charge away from the scene, panic-stricken and traumatised. On more than one occasion, Bob's troops were asked to act as a shield between the armed Indonesians and the civilian population. In Bob's words: "We were asked to intervene between these groups, and on arrival the armed group on the truck stopped pointing their weapons at the civilians and pointed them at us. We pointed our weapons at them. There was a deafening silence as we squared off against each other and my one thought was – "don't even fart!" Just one shot would have started an avalanche of fire going both ways and nobody was going to survive that. Major-General Peter Cosgrove fixed that by telling the Indonesians that if any INTERFET troops felt threatened by the Indonesians, they could use lethal force to save themselves without gaining a clearance to fire from their HQ". That fixed the problem.

When it was time for the Indonesians to leave ET, they began to help themselves to the UN equipment in the UN compound. Bob's dog teams were deployed to dissuade this behaviour. The Indonesians were understandably terrified of the effects of an attack by a large dog, and gave them a wide berth.

On a night patrol through some primary jungle, which ran parallel to the airstrip, Bob had MWD Banjo on point duty for a RAAF ADG patrol. Banjo stopped and would not continue. On investigation into what looked like a big shadow on the ground, a huge hole was discovered. It was filled with dead and decomposing animal parts and broken glass. A fall into that would have meant an immediate contact with all manner of diseases. Banjo saved Bob, and almost certainly, or least one ADG soldier, had the dog not been on point duty on that patrol.

Unusual situations were the order of the day in ET. A patrol from 5/7 RAR had detained a Militia family at a main road checkpoint. They were known to have murdered some local villagers. The locals found out and arrived on the scene in their hundreds, many armed with machetes and home-made guns. They wanted revenge. The 5/7 RAR patrol tried to nudge the crowd with their Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC). But the locals swarmed the APCs and the crews had to "button down" to keep the matter as safe as possible. The Militia family were mainly protected by a MWD and handler. Bob sent two more dog teams to assist. The dog teams managed too move the crowd into three large groups and then they worked the local civilians back into their villages.

That this situation did not degenerate into something very nasty was a credit to everyone. There were many instances of violence in ET. Bob was personally devastated by the injuries be observed to local children and women. There were instances of machete cuts that had festered while the people hid in fear in the jungle, slashes that resulted in the loss of eyesight of one young child and gangrene in the arm of another. People were killed

and their bodies thrown into water wells, children murdered and dumped in rubble and a whole host of viciousness which scars the human condition under such circumstances as experienced in ET at that time.

Bob remained in ET for four months before RTA to Amberley.

### **Back to Amberley**

Bob arrived home at 2300 hrs at night and instead of going on leave, he decided that he needed to do some work in his office. He arrived back at work next morning at 0700 hrs. As he passed the PM (AF) in the corridor, Bob was welcomed with the words “Ah Bob, you’re back from your dash for cash”. The sarcasm was not lost on Bob and he resented being treated like that after the great work he felt he contributed to the ET effort by his MWD teams. Fortunately, most of the RAAF senior officers did not share the PM (AF)’s view on the use of MWD and Bob was gratified to hear them speak highly of the MWD teams.

The ADG management community wanted to take over responsibility for the MWD muster and Bob agreed to help with that. He moved from Amberley to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Airfield Defence Squadron (2 AFDS) to help write up the capability and all the supporting documents and Aide Memoirs to establish the MWD muster in the ADG. In November 2001, Bob elected to discharge from the RAAF but immediately re-enlisted into the RAAF Reserve. He continued in the ADG role as a Reservist.

### **East Timor 2<sup>nd</sup> Deployment**

In January 2001, the Army’s Royal Australian Corps of Military Police (RACMP) was tasked to deploy five MWD teams to ET. The CO of 1 MP Bn needed to bring his MWD up to operational standards in a short period of time and sought RAAF assistance to do so. Bob was the person for the job and he asked for eight dogs from the MPs in order to guarantee five MWD teams to be combat ready in time. In two months, Bob produced three combat ready MWD teams and was then tasked to take them to ET. Bob enlisted the assistance of one of his junior NCOs, Corporal David Towerton, and together they were Force Assigned to 4 RAR. They worked with 4 RAR on ramp-up training in preparation for the deployment to ET, and arrived there in April 2001.

On his arrival back in ET, Bob had hoped for a huge improvement in the standard of life for the locals, but there was very little evidence of that. The East Timorese were still suffering from fundamental Third World problems and this disappointed him. The 4 RAR team was assigned to Balibo, on the ET border with West Timor.

Bob was the commander of the dog section and patrolled many times in some rugged areas. Their main task was tracking duty in support of Army Visual Trackers and Recon Platoon patrols. Bob handled a dog named Jip. Jip was also handled by a female MP, Cpl Carmen Thompson. It took a lot of effort to get her into the patrol area, but she proved to be an asset to the team. She was not authorised to become engaged in firefights with

insurgents, but she could have been in the area of danger as a combat soldier if fighting did break out. It did not, and she benefitted from the experience. Carmen became the first female in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to handle a MWD on an active service patrol. (NOTE: this is not to be confused with RAAF Cpl Vanessa Wallis who became the first female in the ADF to handle a MWD on an active service patrol *with a bullet in the firing chamber of her personal weapon as she operated with a RAAF patrol, with an expectation of being involved in closing with and killing or capturing insurgents*).

In the area of Balibo there are a number of caves. These have been used many times, including during WW II, as hides for armed personnel. Bob's team, including himself and Jip, would search the caves and confirm that there was nobody in them. There was another area of old rice paddy which had been neglected and, as a consequence, the secondary growth had produced a jungle of lantana-like prickly bushes. 4 RAR had the job of clearing this of possible hides for insurgents. This entailed much bashing at the bushes with machetes and it was hard, uncomfortable and tedious work. Bob suggested that the MWD could search around the perimeter of this area and try to detect any human tracks leading into and out of the morass of vegetation. Jip detected a human track and on following it into the prickly mess, discovered a local timber worker who had set himself up in there. Jip indicated without attacking the man. He was not an insurgent, but it proved the value of one MWD, as a combat multiplier, making more efficient a difficult search, compared to a company of infantry soldiers bashing the scrub on that occasion.

CPL David Towerton and his MWD Morgan, successfully completed a seven kilometre track in support of a 4 RAR Recon and Visual Tracker patrol through a host of varying terrain conditions. The track started with the discovery of an Indonesian Army item, discarded cigarettes and a cigarette packet. This was enough for Morgan to scent on and he commenced his track. He tracked over rocks and vegetation into a village, then into a house, then into a room of that house, and indicated the actual person he had been tracking.

After four months in ET for the second time, Bob had to RTA due to ADF regulations concerning his employment and other administrative imperatives which required him to be back at Amberley.

### **“Retirement”**

Bob retired from the RAAF and became a part-time farmer in the Lockyer Valley near Ipswich, but continues his contact with the RAAF at Amberley. His opinion is still respected by the current group of RAAF and MP MWD communities.

There are a number of highlights in Bob's career which should be made. These include:

- Bob trained and then commanded the first ever RAAF MWD teams to be committed to combat operations in the field;
- He trained and commanded the first Army MP MWD teams to be committed to combat operations in the field;

- Bob established the protocols with AQIS which enabled the MWD to return to Australia using a cost-effective and time-efficient process compared to the lengthy and costly quarantine process previously in place. For the vast majority of ADF dogs, this meant being put down in the overseas country. Bob’s work with AQIS removes the excuse to ever do that again;
- He trained all RAAF and Army MP MWD to be committed to ET between 1999 and 2002;
- Bob as the Director, together with his project team, developed the new MWD combat capability in the Australian Defence Force from initial concept to implementation in the field.

These highlights are unique. It is doubted that they will ever be replicated again under the conditions that Warrant Officer Robert “Bob” Jennings OAM had to endure. It should be noted that Bob’s OAM was for outstanding work he produced while he was at 2 SD in Sydney in 1989. There has never been any official recognition for him for the five points listed above.



The first deployment of RAAF MWD to East Timor. WO Bob Jennings OAM and MWD Banjo, Cpl Robbie Peters and MWD Jess, LAC “Kiwi” Gregory and MWD Rocky, LAC Anthony Baker and MWD Sabre, Sgt Andrew Floor and MWD Max, Cpl Shane “Kiwi” Campbell and MWD Cobra, LAC Jim Ingram and MWD Kelly, LAC Sam Evans and MWD Bear, October 1999. Image courtesy of Bob Jennings OAM, 1999.



WO Bob Jennings OAM and MWD Jip take a break. East Timor, 2001. Image courtesy of Bob Jennings, 2001.



WO Bob Jennings OAM and Jip winching from a Blackhawk in East Timor, 2001. Image courtesy of Bob Jennings, 2001.



WO Bob Jennings OAM and Jip in ET, 2001.



Patrol duty in ET 2001. Army MP Cpl Rod Cannon with his MWD Shay supporting 4RAR in August 2001. Image courtesy Bob Jennings OAM, 2001.



PD Hobo at Tengah in Singapore in 1982. Image courtesy of Bob Jennings OAM, 1982.