

## Interviews with War Dog Operatives

### Series 4 - Afghanistan

#### **Warrant Officer David Towerton - Royal Australian Air Force**

Dateline for this profile is 17 May 2013

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#### **Background**

Warrant Officer (WOFF) David Towerton was born in Brisbane in 1963, and grew up in the suburb of Inala. He was educated there and started playing rugby from the age of seven years old. Dave completed Grade 10 and wanted to join the Australian Army. However, Dave recognised the need to have a trade behind him, either through Army training or via the civilian system. He was offered an apprenticeship as an upholsterer in the local area. Dave completed three years of this apprenticeship when he realised that his life was stuck in a shed doing the same things every day. On 1 May 1984, he decided to enlist in the Australian Defence Force. He always had a fascination for aircraft and selected the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) as his service of choice.

Dave's recruiters explained the benefits of a trade through his RAAF training, but he was aware that the RAAF were recruiting dog handlers. He had been with his father many times when they worked sheep with working dogs, and Dave had an affinity with these dogs. He wanted to be a RAAF dog handler from the beginning. He attended his 13 week recruit training at the RAAF Base at Edinburgh near Adelaide in South Australia.

After graduating from his recruit training, he was posted to No. 7 Stores Depot at Toowoomba in Queensland where the basic dog handlers course was conducted. He graduated from this course by the end of 1984 and was posted to RAAF Base Amberley as a Security Guard. His military working dog (MWD) was Police Dog (PD 1048) Ranji. Their principal duty was the protection of military aircraft on the Flight Line, and they operated in cooperation with the RAAF Security Police. Dave worked at RAAF Base Amberley from late 1984 to December 1988 when he was posted to the RAAF Base Butterworth in Malaysia. He held the rank of Leading Aircraftman (LAC).

#### **MALAYSIA**

In 1988, there existed a threat from communist terrorists (CT) who operated in the Malay/Thai border area. Due to the threat from any CT incursion of RAAF assets at Butterworth, RAAF Security Guards were armed and on an operational footing. The main aircraft Dave's team guarded were Australian maritime patrol aircraft. Dave was married with a daughter and all three lived in the Butterworth area for their two year tour of duty. In January 1991, Dave was posted to RAAF Base Darwin. and promoted to Corporal (CPL). Ranji was not able to return to Australia due to the quarantine restrictions which were in operation in those days, and so remained in Malaysia as a Pool Dog. Ranji saw out the rest of his life as a MWD in Malaysia.

#### **DARWIN**

On arrival at RAAF Base Darwin, Dave was required to be re-teamed with a new MWD. He travelled to the RAAF Security and Fire Services School at RAAF Amberley where the MWD are trained and re-teamed with PD 1322 Jasper. The security guard mustering was undergoing a review during 1993-1994. This was influenced by a need to cut back RAAF

personnel numbers from 23,000 all ranks to 13,000. The Australian Government of the time were looking for cost savings and a reduction in the numbers of personnel became a candidate for this approach. These two initiatives encouraged reviews where musterings might be amalgamated and the merging of the Security Police and the Security Guards was an outcome. After a conversion course, Dave and his mustering cohort became Security Police with all the powers of a policeman with a warrant card. This system followed the example of the United States Air Force.

### **EDINBURGH SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

In January 1998, Dave was posted to RAAF Base Edinburgh and promoted to the rank of Sergeant (SGT). Dave became the Senior Non Commissioned Officer (SNCO) of the Operational MWD Cell there. However, during this posting, the tensions and trouble in East Timor caused an international flash point to occur there and the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) had responsibility for peace making in that region. INTERFET was replaced by the United Nations Transitional Administration in ET but the RAAF MWD presence was still required to assist in law and order issues. The Australian Army began patrolling the volatile border region between East and West Timor and Major General Peter Cosgrove MC identified RAAF WOFF Bob Jennings OAM as the person who should deliver a MWD capability to the ground combat element in the border areas. WOFF Jennings organised and coordinated the MWD capability which included Army Military Police and RAAF Security Police dog handlers. WOFF Jennings operated from an office at RAAF Amberley and Dave was required to work with WOFF Jennings on this project. Consequently, Dave spent a lot of time away from his normal base while the project was being delivered at Amberley. The initial dog team members who were made operationally ready to be deployed on tracker duties in support of the Army were SGT David Towerton (RAAF), CPL Aaron Barnett (Army MP), CPL Rod Cannon (Army MP) and CPL Laurie Orth (Army MP). This team were embedded with 4 RAR/Commando Battalion in January 2001 and formed a strong rapport with the personnel of the special forces. Dave was promoted to Flight Sergeant (FSGT) during this period and teamed up with PD Morgan.

### **EAST TIMOR**

In 2001, Dave and his team deployed to East Timor by RAAF air transport C130 aircraft. They departed RAAF Base Richmond, staged through Darwin, and the same day, arrived in Dili. 4 RAR moved by ship from Darwin to Dili. They conducted familiarisation training in the Dili area for about three weeks and then moved into the border area. The move from Dili into the operational area was by road under the command of WOFF Bob Jennings. The dog teams were attached to the 4 RAR Reconnaissance Platoon (Recon PI).

The main duty to be delivered in East Timor was tracker work, in a similar method to the Vietnam War Tracker teams where dog teams were stationed at strategic points ready to be transported to "hot spots" by helicopter or other means. The Australian patrol zones were in the Balibo township area on the border between the Indonesian controlled West Timor and East Timor. On arrival into the operational area, the dog team set up their accommodation and kennel facility plus dug in, as infantry, for tactical reasons.

As time went on, the infantry sections began to thin out due to illness and injuries. There were times when a patrol would be mounted with only five soldiers in it, instead of the optimal nine soldiers. At times, the dog section would be called on to join these patrols as riflemen and perform infantry patrol duties. When not on patrol duties, the dog teams were allocated to both Quick Response Force (QRF) notice to move of 30 minutes or on Immediate Response Force (IRF) notice to move of 15 minutes. The dog teams rotated through

these duties every two days in the interest of sharing the pressure of the IRF requirement. In addition, the dog teams were also required to support five day infantry patrols.

There was a perceived problem that the dogs would lose their motivation on patrols where they were not training and receiving rewards for good work. They just marched with their handlers on patrols. However, the handlers found ways to keep their dogs motivated by using innovative canine training techniques during the patrol and during the rest periods when the opportunity arose.

There were occasions when some villages contained Indonesian militia sympathisers. The Indonesians would cross the border at night and confront the villagers, causing tension. 4 RAR was aware of an incident in the border village of Maliana. Dave recalls: "Our intelligence indicated that there were militia in the village and our troops were required to interdict their actions on the villagers. Our patrols were positioned in this place at night because the militia were intent on reaping 'pay-back' on the folk loyal to the East Timorese authorities rather than their previous Indonesian masters. The decision was taken to set up an ambush between the village and the border and to continue with another patrol's night location inside the village confines. The ambush was situated about 500 metres from the village. The dog team was located in the ambush. During the night, the patrol in the village reported that they had a positive detection of human movement heading for the village. This information came from Thermal Imagery Device and a trip flare which had been set up at a junction point near the border. The ambush was lifted and moved in to support the patrol to assist them search the area. It was very dark and as we began the search, Morgan alerted to something to our front. I told the patrol commander that the dog had an item of interest to the front and so the patrol was halted to give me a chance to confirm what Morgan was alerting to. I pushed him further along and he then showed deep interest in something off to the right of the patrol. As I was moving forward to check my dog, a person stepped out from behind a tree to my front. The patrol went into a tactical formation and challenged the person. The person came forward and confirmed that he was a village sentry keeping watch over an area on the perimeter of the village". This demonstrated the value of the dog team including night patrols.

Maliana is situated in low country which has a river coursing through it. The river line was the border between East and West Timor and this feature constituted the Australian patrol line limit. An incident occurred in this area, as Dave recalls: "A helicopter patrol spotted some militia resting up on the Indonesian side of the river, with what looked like a possible mission to cross the river line into East Timor. We were positioned in the area roughly opposite this group, but on the East Timor side. Our job was to monitor the militia group. As we patrolled this area, Morgan indicated that there was some movement on the opposite bank and we were able to confirm that the militia group were still resting up. The patrol commander decided to position half a section to monitor the militia group while the other half followed up to see if that militia group had been active on the East Timor side. Morgan picked up on a tracking scent and he led us toward a village. As we approached this village, we needed to cross a small river which had an expedient bridge made of logs and rudimentary tread-way planks with gaps between them. It was a bit tricky to cross because there was a 15 metre drop to the water. Morgan was in his tracking harness and I had a long lead attached to that. I could see that he was ignoring the movement of the villagers in the area and was keenly following the scent that he had picked up earlier. And then drama! Morgan looked up for a moment, and with that he fell off the plank. I realised that this was not a good situation for him, but when the lead took up, I quickly heaved on it and prayed that the plastic buckles connecting me to my dog would not collapse. They did not, and I was able to haul him back on to the log. He immediately put his nose down and

continued to track as if nothing had happened. He led us into the village, through some huts and then strongly indicated on one particular hut where the militia had been. This provided positive intelligence for our people which was confirmed as correct at a later time. On our way back from the village, Morgan indicated up a tree on the other side of the border where a militia soldier was located as a sentry. We were able to indicate to him that we knew he was there."

On another occasion Dave was working with a rifle company which had detected militia "sign" of TNI (Indonesian Regular Army) military boot marks in some mud. Dave recalls: "The company requested a tracker dog team to be inserted to assist them track the Militia personnel, but the HQ denied the request. This was a bit frustrating because I was on QRF and could have been there very quickly. More requests for the dog team followed over the next 24 hours at which time the HQ finally agreed to deploy us. Morgan and I were deployed on a helicopter together with another patrol and on arrival at the tracking site, we joined up with the patrol on the ground. There then followed a peculiar, typically Army, stand-off between the patrol commanders as to which patrol was going to conduct the follow-up tracking work using the dog team. The two Section Commanders discussed this point and finally agreed that the original patrol which had found the sign in the first place would conduct the follow-up tracking duty. The "sign" indicated that the Militia were probably headed for a village sympathetic to the Indonesians and close to the border. The commanders decided to have one patrol follow-up the sign while the other reboarded the helicopters and flew into a cut-off position. This all happened at platoon level without the approval of their superior headquarters with the consequent labelling of that force as 'the rogue platoon'. Even though the track was 24 hours old, Morgan picked up the scent immediately and we went into fast pursuit of the TNI. The tracking was copybook. There was no contamination of the Militia signs (TNI bootmarks and scent) and the visual trackers were able to confirm that Morgan was 'on track'. This included times when the scent picture drifted up to eighty metres off the primary trail and Morgan and I followed those slight detours with protective cover from the infantry patrol. We followed this scent for about five hours when we came to a very steep decline which led to a village, some two kilometres away. The visual trackers (both went to the Special Air Service Regiment subsequently) decided to approach the village by way of a steep re-entrant which had the advantage of cover from view rather than use the exposed track which followed a ridgeline. I had to lower Morgan to the guys below me at times, and there were rocks falling on us from our mates above. It was a very steep decline. As we approached the village, we saw some villagers ascending this steep climb headed straight for the patrol. The villagers were hunters and when they met the patrol, there was some communication in the Tetum language before they moved on. We rested up for about 30 minutes during which time we saw a wild cat in the jungle, about the same size as a German Shepherd dog. When we started again, Morgan led us through the village, ignoring several huts and finally arrived at a fence used to hold village animals. On passing through the fenced area, Morgan indicated at the hut inside this fence. Two females opened the door and on searching the interior, the patrol recovered Australian military equipment. This was reported to the HQ. We noted that there were no young men in the village when we moved through it. Our other patrol was in an overwatch position on an adjacent hill with a clear view of the village. Our patrol moved up the hill, married up with that patrol and formed a night observation point in sight of the village. A deception plan was adopted where the helicopters arrived and removed half the group plus the dog team, giving the appearance that the whole patrol effort had been lifted, but in fact, leaving the original patrol still on the ground to observe and report on any suspicious activity in the village. After the patrol, I was briefed by WOFF Bob Jennings that another plan could have been to cast Morgan outside the village in the hope of picking up the Militia scent again, and then follow that sign to confirm where they were

headed. In hindsight, I think that Bob was correct, but at the time in the bush, I had to follow the decisions of the patrol commanders".

Acquiring new techniques on the battlefield has been an ongoing phenomenon since the Stone Age. But sometimes, new ideas meet with unexpected resistance. Although tracking dog teams had been used successfully in Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam, here in East Timor dog team capabilities were being challenged because of the lack of knowledge by some field personnel about the capabilities of dog teams on tracking duties. On one occasion, an Australian company level patrol had a fire fight with an Indonesian patrol about a kilometre or so from the border. A post incident investigation called for a dog patrol to confirm the movement of the Indonesian group. Dave and Morgan were helicoptered to the contact site and having identified some Indonesian spent cartridges on the ground, Morgan tracked the Indonesians through the bush to the border area which confirmed that they had returned to their own side of the border. However, it transpired that one of the patrol commanders who was involved in the original IRF follow up team was not convinced that the tracker team was following up the original "sign". He challenged Dave's advice when Morgan indicated the direction of movement of the Indonesians. Some time was spent convincing this person that the Militia had extricated back to their side of the border. The lesson was clear. Have faith in the dog and the information being offered by the dog handler.

In November 2001, Dave and Morgan returned to Australia by RAAF C130 air transport from Dili to RAAF Base Richmond. Dave went through de-brief at Holsworthy while Morgan underwent his mandatory AQIS 30 day quarantine at Eastern Creek near Sydney in NSW.

## **IRAQ**

After post ET leave and quarantine for Morgan, they were posted to RAAF Base Richmond in NSW. Dave attended his promotion course for Warrant Officer at RAAF Base Wagga Wagga. During his time in ET, Dave's wife Karolynn and their two children had moved to Brisbane and set up in their home there. So in early 2002, it was pack up again and move the family to Richmond. In February 2003, Dave was sent to Qatar in readiness for the insertion of Australian troops into the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) for the occupation phase on completion of the operational phase in Iraq.

The main USAF air head in Iraq was based on C130 (Hercules) air transport aircraft. RAAF support was collocated with the USAF. This was an 'extreme security' base and there were several layers of security screening for all personnel and vehicles entering the area. One of the layers was the military working dog capability which provided explosive detection dogs (EDD) to screen people and vehicles as well as dog team guard duty. Dave worked on security and intelligence duties which included personal security for the movement of senior commanders and VIPs. He did not have a dog, but was the advisor to his commander on the capabilities of dog teams as well as other force protection security aspects. With the easing of operational demand on air transport at Qatar, the coalition air capability was drawn down and in April 2003, Dave returned to Australia.

## **RAAF EXPLOSIVE DETECTION DOGS**

On his return to Australia, Dave resumed his work as the Head of the RAAF MWD capability based at RAAF Richmond. This was followed by a posting to Head of MWD capability at Combat Support Group headquarters. This was a Warrant Officer (WOFF) position. However, due to the way the number of WOFFs was allocated against Security Police positions, Dave could not be promoted to the rank because all WOFF positions were filled

and therefore none were available for his promotion to occur. Dave was posted to the Combat Support Group HQ (CSGHQ) based at RAAF Amberley in 2003 and wore the rank of WOFF in that unit.

As an Acting WOFF, Dave established a development proposal to establish a RAAF explosive detection dog (EDD) capability. This EDD capability was designed to protect the interior of a RAAF Base where an explosive device threat could become a reality. Outside the wire of a RAAF base, the EDD capability is the responsibility of Army Engineers. However, much to Dave's surprise, the Defence system requires any new capability to be assessed at a number of levels before it can be implemented. In this case, the RAAF EDD capability took about five years of collaboration with Army, Australian Customs, Federal Police, State Police and other interested parties to arrive at a model and a methodology which was cost effective to the RAAF. One reason for this is that the RAAF EDD capability is low risk, low intensity searching compared to Army engineers where the environment is one of high risk, high intensity operational combat engineer duty. The RAAF needed assurances that their capability was not going to be an over-serviced system which was not appropriate inside the wire of a RAAF base. Dave provided both the assurances and the management system to ensure that the RAAF EDD asset was designed to satisfy the RAAF base environment. The project included the training and search methods used by Australian border security. Customs dog team trainers worked with the RAAF for several years to get the RAAF EDD capability up and running. The capability is still being developed by way of command and control issues and there is still a need for the EDD muster to realize an internal long term RAAF strategy. At this time (2013), the focus by many RAAF managers is on what is needed in their own local area without there being a general long term strategy in place. This will come, eventually.

In addition to his EDD interests, Dave was also responsible for reviewing the older management and training practices which had survived in the RAAF for many years. His reviews confirmed that some "old" practices had to cease, others modified and new practices developed. This was in response to changing circumstances at RAAF bases where security, dog training, acquisition programs, administration and management of the MWD capability needed a fresh approach. This review process also confirmed that the MWD capability in the RAAF had to be based on a more dynamic and progressive basis than had been the case in the past. The RAAF attitude to working off old and established procedures made way for a more robust and science based approach where new techniques and ideas could be assessed on their own merits. Dave was successful in the introduction of many new approaches to the provision of the MWD capability in the RAAF.

### **SPECIAL AIR SERVICE REGIMENT AND AFGHANISTAN THREE TIMES**

In mid-2004, some members of the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) contacted Dave to explore the possibilities of training dogs in Combat Assault Dog capabilities. Early discussions proved that the way was open for the development of specialist dog teams suitable for employment on special operations, particularly in the Afghanistan War.

In early 2005, a group of SASR operatives arrived at RAAF Base Amberley and attended a MWD course. Later that year, Dave took a three man team of RAAF dog liaison officers to the SASR in Western Australia and began a training program. The team included a FSGT, a SGT and a CPL. At that time, Dave could not go to the SASR as his work with the EDD mustering was still an ongoing requirement at RAAF Amberley and so he remained at the HQCSG. This included the conduct of EDD courses under the control of Australian Customs staff and Customs dogs plus the conduct of a course for the Queensland Police Service. These courses were conducted in the School of Security and Fire Services (SFS)

at RAAF Amberley. During this time, Dave was attracted by the Queensland Police Service as a dog trainer and decided that he should resign from the RAAF. The process of this took a little while and Dave became unsure if a move outside the RAAF was a wise one. He decided to cancel his application for discharge. This was a stroke of bad luck for Dave because he relinquished his acting Warrant Officer rank and then had to revert to the rank of FSGT. However, this was also a stroke of good fortune. Dave was now able to push for acceptance as the FSGT based at SASR in WA. and he was posted to the SASR in January 2009. Dave was appointed as the commander of canine development on behalf of the CO SASR. Dave considered that title a little grandiose and called himself the SNCOIC of canine training instead. Dave's training team consisted of two RAAF personnel and two Army Military Police (MP) dog trainers. Dave had taken the role over from the inaugural RAAF trainers to the SASR and they had conducted the initial start-up work and initial deployments of SASR dog teams to Afghanistan during the period 2006/07.

In 2009, Dave had the job of liaising with all the SASR stakeholders to determine the way forward. He produced a management plan which had its objectives set on defined outcomes and then produced a project path which would develop a mature end point from which combat ready dog teams could be produced. There was another significant aspect of SASR dog management which had to be addressed. This was working in closely with all the squadrons of the SASR so that all personnel knew how to command, control, use and maintain the dog teams embedded with them on operations. The worth of the dog teams on operations was not an issue. All personnel were convinced of their combat multiplier effect on the battlefield. However, the dog teams came with their own special wants and needs and these had to be realized and delivered in the field. Dave's project skills delivered this requirement. This was delivered, in part, by assigning a dog liaison officer (DLO) to each SASR squadron. The DLO trained the teams, coordinated the capability, organised canine kit and specialised equipment, and solved transport and accommodation issues. The DLO also deployed to Afghanistan with the SASR dog teams when his squadron deployed. Dave went to Tarin Kowt in Afghanistan two times when his squadron deployed in 2009 and 2011 and then a third deployment in January 2012. The tenure there was about four months on each rotation. During the 2011 deployment Corporal Mark Donaldson VC went to Afghanistan as a dog handler. Mark had qualified as a dog handler on the second SASR dog handlers course which had the new training management plan (TMP) as its fundamental guidance.

The initial SASR dog teams were trained using a modified RAAF dog training TMP. This TMP was reviewed and a new one produced which was specific to the recruitment, selection, training and combat readiness of special operations dog teams. The name of this new TMP is "Combat Assault Dog Course". One of Dave's objectives was to produce SASR dog team trainers who could eventually deliver all the requirement of the combat assault dog course without any reliance on RAAF and MP personnel. By 2011, the SASR had moved into this capability, and the RAAF and MP personnel remained with them in an advisory DLO role. The principal role for the combat assault dog was to detect the presence of personnel to the front of a SASR patrol and if necessary, deal with the situation should the personnel be confirmed as enemy soldiers. The dogs also detect a wide range of other items of interest such as hidden explosives, weapons and ammunition.

Dave served in Afghanistan three times. He noted that the rules of engagement and orders for opening fire had changed each time that he rotated back in country. He was aware that these battlefield control measures were an evolving requirement on a continuously changing battlefield, such as Afghanistan. The dogs adapted very quickly to any changes made and it is obvious that dogs in battle confer a distinct combat multiplier effect

to the force that uses them. This has resulted in an increased demand for dog teams in the ADF covering explosive detection (Army Engineers), general security duties (RAAF and Army MP) and specialist patrol work (SASR).

Continuous improvement is the catch cry of the SASR CAD programme. Dave remarks that the standard of the CAD at the basic level is higher than that of a RAAF security dog after many years of training. The reason for this is the operational requirement. RAAF security dogs are in a more passive role when they search and detect intruders on a RAAF base. But the SASR CAD teams are "out front" on high risk missions. Second rate is simply not good enough. Complacency of having reached a high standard of dog capability is not good enough. In the SASR, a "standard" will never be good enough and will always be under pressure to improve, modify and adapt.

The SASR and the RAAF have their own canine breeding programmes. They produce pups which are born into an ADF environment, trained in it with all the sights and sounds which this environment produces and then work with the guys that they have matured with. This produces a high success rate with dogs while at the same time, reducing many of the more demanding effects of military life, such as being gun-shy, riding in helicopters, being in the area of explosions and the need to move quietly around any number of friendly troops and civilians.

### **BACK TO RAAF AMBERLEY**

Prior to Dave leaving the SASR, he made sure that the SASR dog trainers at Campbell Barracks in Perth were in a position to run their own programme, train their own handlers and dogs and continue with their operational capability. RAAF DLO personnel are still in place with the SASR but their role has become one of advice and technical support. SASR also pioneered a quarantine facility and certification process so that the ADF canines are able to proceed through Australia's robust quarantine regulations without the need to transport dogs returning from overseas to Australia through the AQIS station at Eastern Creek near Sydney, NSW.

In early 2013, Dave was posted to RAAF Amberley and promoted to Warrant Officer. He is in charge of MWD training and employment at the School of Fire and Security Services. His major project in 2013 was to bring in the new mustering of "Security Forces Dog Handler". This is a product of continuous improvement within the RAAF and provides a targeted capability to protect the new weapons and combat support platforms being introduced into the RAAF.

Dave intends to continue in the ADF in the area of MWD canine and handler training. His experiences with the SASR and on the battlefield in Afghanistan positions him well to promote new ideas and capabilities in the protection of ADF assets both within Australia and in overseas areas. This includes the use of electronic devices mounted on to dogs to assist in the follow-up of items which may be hidden in small spaces by intruders.

Dave is exceptionally physically fit. He manages to win every long distance biathlon (dog and handler) events conducted by associate government canine organisations. He has a passion for the surf lifesaver movement and spends time with them in their self-less drive to save people from the perils of surf swimming. He is a potential competitive triathlon athlete.

## **SAVING SAPPER SARBI**

In her book "Saving Private Sarbi", Sandra Lee uses the rank of the infantry soldier as Sarbi's rank (possibly following the movie "Saving Private Ryan"? However, Sarbi is an engineer EDD and when she disappeared from CPL D's control on 3 September 2008 she was performing her task as an explosive detection dog. The rank of the engineer soldier is Sapper. Sarbi vanished after a huge contact between allied troops and Taliban soldiers where Trooper Mark Donaldson earned his Victoria Cross. CPL D (later SGT) earned his Medal of Valour in the same battle.

Miraculously, about 13 months later, Sarbi was discovered by an American officer while on an operational mission. This American had been in the same battle as both CPL D and Trooper Mark Donaldson VC and knew that the Australians had lost their dog during this engagement. He saw Sarbi and decided to recover her back to the Australians.

When Sarbi came back into Tarin Kowt, she was quarantined away from the other engineer EDDs. Dave was back in Afghanistan with his SASR SQN as the DLO when Sarbi was recovered back into Australian hands. He was given the task of commencing some kind of rescue mission in order to have her repatriated to Australia. But, it was never going to be easy for him. He remembers: "The SASR dogs were kennelled on one side of an aerial farm and the engineer dogs on the other. I was told to go and look at this dog and, if I was convinced that she was the missing Sarbi, commence an action which might bring her back to Australia. I looked over the kennel wire and saw a black dog lying out in the sun. She was dirty and fat. A Labrador. Not what I imagined an Afghani dog would look like. I needed some sort of assurance that this was the missing EDD, so I asked for a tennis ball from the Sappers. I rolled it at her and she very convincingly went for it, just like the EDD do as a reward for finding explosives".

"Sarbi had not received any quarantine control measures from the day she disappeared. I knew that this was going to be a big problem with the strict Australian quarantine regulations. Clearly, Sarbi had to be treated just as if she had never been born in Australia, and was now considered a dog originating from Afghanistan. I commenced by ensuring that she received every canine medication and vaccination that was available through the veterinary resources in country. This was followed by positive blood analysis tests to ensure that the vaccinations were working. They did work and the next step was to have Sarbi held in a third country quarantine environment for a period of not less than six months. There were a few candidate countries which AQIS would accept as having the appropriate standard for entry of an animal into Australia - for example the United Kingdom".

"So, I started this process by taking Sarbi, by air, to the United States Army Veterinary Corps in Kandahar. The veterinarians performed their work and she was a hit with all the staff just because of her playful personality. I stayed with her for about a week and we were accommodated in the SOTG base in that city. Even the CO of SOTG offered his briefing room for Sarbi's overnight accommodation, which I knocked back because it would have been a different room after she had finished with it during the night. Sarbi and I flew back to TK. I had a few good-natured ideas put to me about smuggling Sarbi back to Australia, but that would have been a recipe for disaster had she been discovered entering Australia without satisfying all the proper AQIS requirements. So, I stuck to my plan. However, my SQN was about to rotate out of country and me with it. I left Sarbi with personnel I could trust with her health and care. I departed TK in December 2009 and passed on the plan to the next group of dog handlers who could look after her".

"However, the plan was not maintained and, for a little while, it appeared that Sarbi's repatriation was not being pursued with the alacrity it deserved. This situation was eventually realised by the powers that were in place at that time and formal applications to have the dog moved out of Afghanistan were submitted. Approval by the Afghani government followed and Sarbi was moved on to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates for her six month quarantine. The veterinarians there performed all the required AQIS health checks and assessments and finally, Sarbi returned to Australia where she lives with SGT D and poses for photos at the dog shrine at the School of Military Engineering at Moorebank in NSW".

SGT Dave Towerton with PD Morgan in East Timor supporting infantry patrols, 2001.



SGT Dave Towerton and PD Morgan in East Timor (UNTAET) 2001.





SGT Towerton and PD Morgan supporting APC mounted infantry in UNAET, 2001.