



WHEN A DOG IS TRULY A MAN'S BEST FRIEND

There are many types of working dogs across the globe – but few are more critical to human life than those that sniff out explosives in Afghanistan.

These dogs are saving the lives of Australian soldiers and civilians alike.

Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) are the biggest threats to Australian soldiers in Afghanistan. They are often pre-positioned in or by a road in the hope that that coalition convoys will drive by. IEDs placed by insurgents necessarily endanger and kill local civilians as well as coalition forces.

One of the vital assets in Australia's fight against IEDs is the Explosive Detection Dog (EDD). These dogs are specifically trained to sniff out explosives and, under the direction of a dog handler, provide an initial clearance of ground before human assets provide further clearance.

One such team are handler Sapper Stuart Conlin and his dog 'Solo'.

"My job is mainly clearing paths, routes, overwatches, compounds and making sure that the whole convoy can get from A to B safely along with the search team" said Sapper Conlin.

Training these dogs takes over twelve months' worth of dedicated work. "Solo was trained at the School of Military Engineering. They train dogs to sniff out explosives and weapons," said Sapper Conlin.

"In Australia we'd throw him the tennis ball as a reward and make a big song and dance, roll around on the ground. Over here we obviously don't throw him the tennis ball out there," Sapper Conlin said.

A major part of the ongoing training is control. "I maintain control by being the only feeder" said Sapper Conlin – he's a Labrador so instinctively loves food. The same can be said for any reward. "I don't mind when people walk past and give him a pat. It's just when I'm not there and they sit down and treat him like a pet. He's not a pet."

Sapper Conlin and Solo are part of Australia's Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force-2 in southern Afghanistan.

The Australian Army have employed working dogs since World War One. In 1981, The Royal Australian Engineer Corps ceased the training of mine detection dogs and commenced training of EDDs. Since then, the EDDs have had a varied role supporting soldiers on the following operations.

- 1993 SOMALIA (OP SOLACE)
- 1994 BOUGAINVILLE PNG (OP LAGOON)
- 1997 US PRESIDENTIAL VISIT (PORT DOUGLAS)
- 1998 EXPO 88 (BRISBANE)
- 1999 EAST TIMOR (OP STABILISE)
- 2000 SYDNEY OLYMPICS (OP GOLD)
- 2002 COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING
- 2003 SOLOMON ISLANDS WEAPONS AND EXPLOSIVES (OP ANODE)
- 2003 RUGBY WORLD CUP (OP SCRUMMAGE)
- 2005 Current AFGANISTAN (OP SLIPPER)

It takes 19 weeks of training to qualify an explosive detection dog and 15 weeks of training to qualify a handler at the School of Military Engineering

Note: Three Australian Army Explosive Detection Dogs serving with the Australian Army in Afghanistan have died on duty:

- 'Merlin', an Australian Army Explosive Detection Dog serving with the Reconstruction Task Force was accidentally killed in a vehicle incident on 31 August 2007.
- 'Razz' an Australian Army Explosive Detection Dog serving with the Special Operations Task Group was killed in an Improvised Explosive Device incident on 20 September 2007. His handler was also wounded in this incident.
- 'Andy' an Australian Army Explosive Detection Dog serving with the Special Operations Task Group was killed in a vehicle incident on 22 November 2007.
- An Australian Army Explosive Detection Dog serving with Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force-1 was injured in an Improvised Explosive Device incident of 30 January 2009.

Army Explosive Detection Dogs (EDD) who have paid the ultimate sacrifice whilst serving on operations have been honored with a memorial at the School of Military Engineering in Sydney; sitting immediately adjacent to the memorial commemorating those personnel who have also lost their lives in conflict.



Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force 2 (MRTF2), Combat Engineer Explosive Detection Dog (EDD) handler Sapper Stuart Conlin, gives his mate "Solo" a well earned rest and a pat for another job well done after a patrol in Sarab, Southern Afghanistan



Members of MRTF2 stepped up operations during the Afghan Election, giving people the chance to have their say in the future of their country. With a persistent coalition presence in Oruzgan Province, insurgents didn't carry out their threat of deadly attacks to intimidate voters on the important day



Sapper Stuart Conlin and his dog "Solo," interact with a member of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), who is intrigued by "Solo" - not ever having seen a Labrador before

Below,
Sapper Stuart Conlin and his dog "Solo," on patrol in Sarab, Southern Afghanistan

